

CINEMA OF EXPERIENCE:
BRAZILIAN FILM AND THE PROCESSES OF PRODUCTION

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This dissertation on Brazilian cinema dialogues with theories about the role of corporeality and sensation in film experience, but relocates the discussion from cinema's moment of reception to the moment of production. This relocation reflects not just the need to reevaluate the place of the body in film theory—in the wake of works by Stephen Shaviro, Linda Williams, Vivian Sobchack, and others, which emphasize viewership—but also addresses a tendency specific to Brazilian cinema. Starting roughly in 1974, with Bodansky and Senna's *Iracema: uma transa amazônica*, and becoming more pronounced since the 1990s, this tendency is characterized by a shift in emphasis from the finished product, intended to affect the viewer in a belated scene of viewing, to the physicality of encounters and interactions between bodies and audiovisual technologies that unfold in the here-and-now of filming.

The films resulting from this change in emphasis are still works of cinema in the sense that they are completed works, released in theaters and circulated as DVDs or digital files. Yet this dissertation argues that these films' thrust lies less in their attributes as finished pieces than in the experiential events enabled by their making. Through key examples by directors like Bodansky and Senna, Andrea Tonacci, João Moreira Salles, Cao Guimarães, and especially Eduardo Coutinho, this study details this turn from

film as product to film as process and draws out its aesthetic and political implications. In order to better delineate the practices that emerge from this shift, as well as to distinguish them from the “representational” approaches that prevail in most cinemas, this dissertation proposes the notion of “the cinema of experience”—a category whose critical value exceeds the present work.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Gustavo was born and raised in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. At the age of 19 he immigrated to the United States, where he worked for several years as a carpenter before becoming a non-traditional student at the College of the Redwoods, a community college in Northern California. After transferring to Wesleyan University, he received his B.A. with High Honors for a thesis on the fiction of Roberto Bolaño, in 2007. He received his M.A. from Cornell in Romance Studies, with a minor in film, in 2010, and his Ph.D. in 2012. He currently lives in Carrboro, NC, with his wife and two children, and teaches Luso-Brazilian Studies at Duke University.

For those who make this world a home:
My mother, Gracie, Tiago, and the little lumping, soon to be born.

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Introduction

The Cinema of Experience

What is the place of the body and of embodied experience in film? There is no single way to answer or even to ask this question. Yet, this question has been repeatedly cast by film theory, and it informs this dissertation on Brazilian cinema. As this study will think through films at least as much as about them, I will develop my own configuration of the question through a close engagement with a segment of Carlos Diegues' classic *Bye bye Brasil* (1979). Diegues' film is typically understood as a reflection on Brazil's transition from traditional ways of life to a problematic, uneven modernity. As the director himself explains, "the idea was to make a film about a country shortly to be born in place of another on the brink of disappearance" (cited in Vieira 161). But the film is also located at a turning point of Brazilian cinema, at the outer reaches of the *cinema novo* movement and its offshoots and sometime before the next creative wave that began in the 1990s. The terms of this transition are most compellingly suggested in the film's mise-en-scene, which stages the interactions and tensions between abstractions of meaning and the immediacy of corporeal presence and sensation. Though laden with allegorical connotations, *Bye bye Brasil* intimates the emergence of an increasingly un-allegorical, even non-representational cinema that is highly invested in embodied experience at the moment of production. This dissertation will explain this approach to the audiovisual under the

rubric of “the cinema of experience.”

In a suggestive moment of Diegues’ film, the nomadic carnival troupe “caravana rolidei,” after having decided to try to try their luck in the Trans-Amazonian Highway frontier town of Altamira, gathers near their truck. Their leader, Lorde Cigano (Gypsy Lord) rummages in the cab for a national road map. From his complaints (“I know I have one, someone gave it to me!”) we can infer that, despite their constant traveling, the group has never used the map. This misplacement of a locating device is, of course, ironic—and the irony will resonate after this scene as the introduction of the map and the undertaking of the voyage to Altamira will leave them feeling misplaced and out of sorts. But let’s put the narrative on pause for the moment and note the elements interacting on the screen. On the lower left, the door displays a painted landscape scene: a mountain, or rather the impressionistic rendition of a mountain, which could be any mountain or none at all. On the upper right, an array, or rather a disarray of visual images decorates and even obstructs the windshield. Among these, we can discern human silhouettes and countless images of human hands, which, pressed against the glass, seem to be reaching out to touch the world or to receive its touch (Figure 1).

Once we note these elements, we can trace their modulation when, following Lorde Cigano’s finding of the map, both a change in figure placement and a cut to a longer shot alter their relationship. Lorde shuts the door and moves forward to the front of the truck. We then see the troupe looking at their leader as he, open map in hand, reads aloud their route, naming the towns along the way to their destination. The painting on the door and the hands on the windshield are no longer visible as the

map's advance, in effect, displaces them.

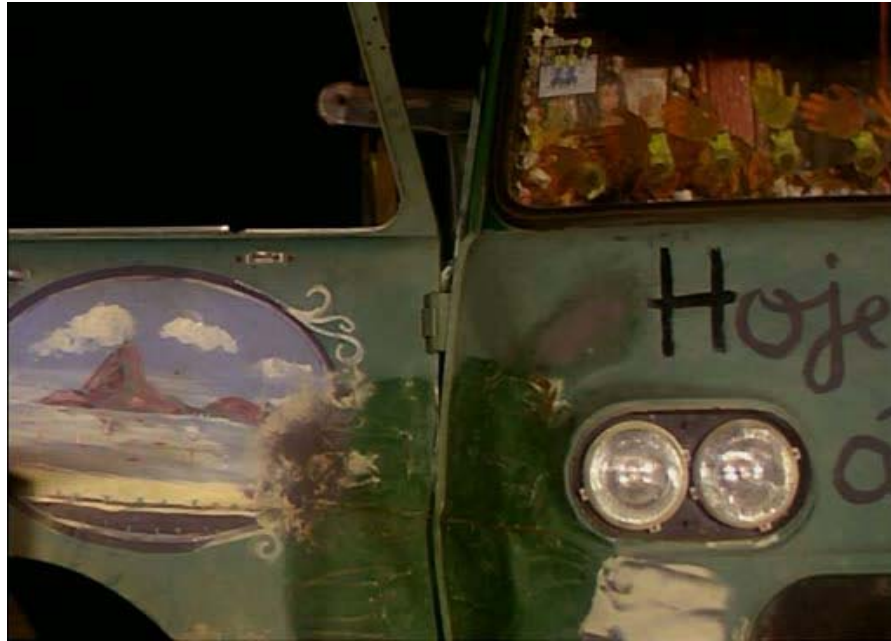


Figure 1

The appearance of the map—bringing to the screen “myriad tensions,” as Tom Conley writes speaking of other maps in other films—is an invitation to think not just about different modes of traveling but also about different types of spatial experience. The fact that the carnival troupe has never used the device before is suggestive of their improvisational errantry, which does not rely on an overview of the territory but rather on a knowledge of nomadic routes that loosely guides them. This nuanced difference, implicit in the film, could very well illustrate what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the difference between smooth and striated spaces:

In striated space, lines or trajectories tend to be subordinated to points: one goes from one point to another. In the smooth it is the opposite: the points are subordinated to the trajectory. . . . In smooth space, the line is therefore a vector, a direction and not . . . a metric determination. It is space constructed

by local operations involving changes in direction (*Thousand* 478).

If before the group was guided by playful improvisation and could alter their route on a whim, their trajectory is now emplaced between points on a map, a line subordinated to a departure “here” and a destination “there.” This formulation is akin to de Certeau’s distinction between what he calls the strategies of place and the tactics of space. While authorized strategies arrest the contingencies of space into proper places that can be named and delineated on a cartographical grid, tactics of inhabitation, whose spatio-temporal immediacy is suggested by the hands pressed against the glass, repotentialize space with indetermination.¹

In other words, the scene’s complex constellation of visual elements suggests tensions between distinct spatio-temporal possibilities consisting of, on the one hand, moment-by-moment inhabitation inflected with the immediacy of bodily experience and, on the other hand, modes of representation such as the map, which subsume the experiencing body to the strategies of an ordering logic. It is relevant that on the way to Altamira the troupe will be traveling along the Trans-Amazonian highway, that epic project of Brazil’s military government intended to connect the Atlantic coast with the Amazonian jungle and thus consolidate the vast and socially diverse national territory. Although never fully completed, the road, inaugurated in 1972, had substantial human and environmental consequences, as we will see in Chapter 1, in relation to Bodansky and Senna’s film *Iracema: uma transa amazônica* (1974). The highway project manifests the same logic as the national road map: an authoritative document that attempts to contain and manage the contingencies of space and experience. As

¹ For more on de Certeau’s notions of strategy and tactic, see *The Practice of Everyday Life*. I will engage with him in a more elaborate manner in Chapter 1.

sociologist Zygmunt Bauman observes, modern cartography, in the service of both the state's managerial ambition and the flow of capital, effected a gradual displacement of the body. While throughout history parts of the human body—such as handfolds, feet, and elbows—were used to take the inexact measure of the world, modernity's administrative requirements demanded the imposition of uniform units of measurement, subduing the variety of local systems (27-28). Moreover, the ambition of the logic that makes space “legible to administrative powers” (33) also came to operate in the opposite direction: space was forced to comply with the logic of maps. Speaking of two steps of this modern development, Bauman writes: “Before, it was the map which reflected and recorded the shapes of the territory. Now, it was the turn of the territory to become a reflection of the map, . . . to be reshaped . . . in the likeness of the map” (35).² The Trans-Amazonian Highway, understood as an attempt to unify a territory already neatly contained by the national map, illustrates this development.

In relation to this process of national unification, the scene's inclusion of a national road map along with the impressionistic painting of a mountain and the palms pressed against the windshield activates, within the film's complex visual logic, a number of far-reaching tensions. In contention with the map's impersonal abstraction and its rational containment of space, the picture on the door is emotive and evocative, serving no official administrative purpose. The decorations on the windshield, too, differ from the map in that, unlike the geometry that orders cartographic space, the stickers, in a chaotic arrangement, seem to have been placed on a whim. More

² To be more precise, here Bauman has in mind the type of urban development that Ángel Rama describes as “la ciudad letrada,” according to which the planned city becomes a spatial document of modern rationality, the inscription of a textual logic directly into space. Brasília, which is visited by *Bye bye Brasil's* troupe in another episode of the film, is a potent example of this inscription.

importantly, the silhouettes and the multitude of hands are suggestive of a tactile curiosity that reaches for an embodied, physical encounter with the world rather than a removed observation or rationalization of it. When Lorde comes forward with the map, displacing the mountain and the palms from the first plane, the *mise-en-scene* stages the displacement of affective experience by the map. Significantly, after the map's appearance, conflicting senses of location and dislocation, orientation and disorientation—what I will call problems of situation—are recurrent in the film and relate to the title, which bids farewell to the country the film so avidly travels and depicts.

Before elaborating on these problems of situation, another visual element, in addition to those present in Figure 1 (the map, the painting, the hands), needs to be acknowledged: the television. It too plays an important part in the tensions between forms of visibility and local, embodied sensibilities, between distinct senses of being emplaced or displaced. The troupe's journey into the jungle follows its disappointing reception in small towns which, although previously receptive to their show, are now engrossed in newly acquired television sets. Rede Globo replaces localized forms of entertainment and performance with nationally televised programs, advancing its own form of standardization. In one instance, the troupe's show has no attendees as the entire town has gathered in the public square to watch a telenovela. Interestingly, they meet another traveling artist who is also sensing that his business is at an end. The man operates a reel-to-reel projector in a tent—in other words, a rustic, mobile movie theater. The television, then, enters into a media ecology that includes the map as a document of administrative strategies, television's mass entertainment, live

performance, and cinema itself—represented, in this scene, by a man and his projector. In the context set up by *Bye bye Brasil*, these media participate and contend in a world in which local sensibilities are undergoing transformation, and at times, even erasure.

But let me return to the Altamira sequence better to locate these issues, as well as the problems of situation. About halfway in the journey, these problems are strongly felt in the troupe's encounter with the remnants of an indigenous tribe, also voyagers on their way to Altamira. Lorde had hoped that they would meet natives at their Amazonian destination, natives who had never seen a television and would receive the troupe with awe. Prone to exaggeration, he had imagined the adventure as a quest for a prelapsarian world, a pristine place still awaiting discovery. Thus, encountering this Altamira-bound tribe, migrating into rather than away from the jungle, and sporting sunglasses and western clothes, is more than a bit disorienting.

The dialogue between the troupe and the natives underscores this sense of dislocation, beginning with the fact that the tribe is migrating west, into the jungle. The tribe's leader explains that they are on the way to Altamira to "pacify" the white man, who has destroyed their village. His mother, he adds, hopes to fly in an airplane when they get there. Lorde, annoyed with what seems to him as confusion, snaps: "To travel by plane in Altamira? This is the Amazonian jungle! . . . Have you heard of it?" The baffled question is comical because it is directed at natives who have failed to live up to the pristine image of Amazonian Indians that Lorde had entertained. Further, the statement is made while they are standing in the jungle itself. The awkwardness of being in a place and speaking of it as if it were elsewhere is repeated on the ride to

Altamira when the mother of the tribe's chief asks a troupe member: "Are you from Brazil?"—a construction that suggests they are outside Brazil even as they travel, according to the map, deep in the country's interior. The father of the chief follows the question by asking if the president of Brazil is well—implying that Brazilians and their president inhabit the same spaces, as might be the case for a tribe and its chief. The person being asked, the youngest member of the carnival troupe, is unable to field either question, as both questions reflect a sense of being emplaced (or displaced) incompatible with her own. All of this finds echo in the soundtrack that accompanies this part of the film, Chico Buarque's "Bye bye Brasil," which goes: "No Tocantins/ O chefe dos parintintins/ Vidrou na minha calça Lee/ Eu vi uns patins pra você/ Eu vi um Brasil na tevê" ("In Tocantins/ The Chief of the Parintitins/ Was thrilled with my Lee Jeans/ I found some skates for you/ I saw a Brazil on TV"). The song plays with the same sense of dislocation: It is possible to speak from specific places in Brazil as if one were in a foreign land and to see "a" Brazil on TV, the indefinite article suggesting the existence of multiple versions, so that one of them may appear on TV. The cartographic emplacement accompanying the feeling of displacement is enhanced by the lyrics' mention of several points on the map such as Maceió, Manaus, and Belém—roughly plotting the troupe's own course from east to west.

But even before the dialogues elaborate on problems of situation, the moment of encounter with the natives resonates with the tensions I have been describing. The troupe has stopped to rest by a pond. Lorde Cigano lies on a hammock and practices a trick, making silver marbles appear between his fingers—a tactile operation, to be sure. A low-angle shot from the shore shows a steep bank, on which we see the

troupe's truck and the group of natives approaching the bank's edge and looking down at the troupe. Considering the palms on the windshield, the viewer is more than justified in paying close attention to hands, a factor reinforced by the close-ups of Lorde's hand performing the marble trick. But the scene does more than reinsert hands in the first plane: touch and visuality are brought here into a dynamic interaction. Lorde coolly acknowledges the presence of the natives and slightly turns towards them on the hammock, allowing them to see his trick. A medium close-up shows him holding a silver marble between his fingers and with a slight movement bringing out a second marble. This is followed by a medium close-up of one of the natives, establishing that he, while appearing only mildly interested, is watching the trick. In the next shot, Lorde appears a little closer than before. This time, his hand is out of the field of vision at first, until he moves it into view, now holding three marbles. A medium shot of another native is followed by a close-up of Lorde's hand. Again, the hand is at first out of the frame, but when he moves it in, it holds four marbles. I describe this sequence because what begins as a tactile trick, dependent on the ability of a character's fingers, becomes a cinematic, visual trick. Each time he slides his hands into view, he is already holding more marbles than before. But the natives do not see his hand in close-up nor is there, from the perspective of the diegesis, any off-screen space.

Subtly, what takes place is the subordination of hand skills to a camera-dependent artifice. If we recall that one of the fantasies of the troupe is a place without the distraction of screens, the subordination of hand skills to screen artifice is inflected with ambiguity. In fact, critics have aptly noted the film's general ambivalence about

the television.³ One can read in it mourning for the loss of localisms due to the spread and homogenizing effect of television (thus its title bids farewell to a “traditional Brazil,” writes one critic).⁴ At the same time, the film’s protagonists are played by well-known soap opera stars José Wilker and Betty Faria—people whose images indeed appear on television screens in the farthest corners of the country.⁵

The physical placement of the natives in the scene also contributes to the problems of situation. Lined up on the edge of the bank and surveyed by the camera in a slow tracking shot from left to right, the natives’ bodies, frozen in postures and gestures, give the momentary impression that they are components of a diorama, arrested in time and space. It as if they were put on display—an impression reinforced not just by their awkward stillness but also by the fact that they hold a number of curiosities including a turtle, a monkey, and a radio held close to the ear by the tribe’s ageing matriarch.⁶ Some of the natives have blank stares, as if their bodies were present but their minds somewhere else. Others seem to be striking a pose, such as the teenage boy with a cocked hat, affecting the demeanor of a gun-fighting cowboy. The small children hold the most interesting objects: a toy airplane and two boxes which turn out to be toy televisions (Figures 2 and 3). The airplane, held in a somewhat unnatural manner by the stilled child, suggests the tribe’s relationship to modern forms

³ For instance, see Elena, Alberto and Díaz López, Marina. *The Cinema of Latin America*. London: Wallflower Press, 2006.

⁴ See Randall Johnson’s *Brazilian Cinema*.

⁵ It is common in Brazil for cinema and theater actors to also work in television networks. For instance, Oscar nominated Fernanda Montenegro of the international success *Central Station* (1998), also made a career as a soap opera star.

⁶ This is reminiscent of the scene in Mario de Andrade’s *Macunaíma* in which the hero returns to the jungle bringing his favorite discoveries from the civilization of São Paulo: a clock and a pistol, which he wears as earrings, and a pair of longhorn chickens, which he carries in a cage.

of mobility, and ultimately to technology. It also foreshadows the fact that they will indeed fly in an airplane once they get to Altamira. The TVs, also suggestive of technology in a broad sense, speak more specifically to their relationship to media images even as they pose in a diorama-like scene. But here these objects, both airplane and TVs, are still innocent toys, playthings that yield to the children's imaginations. These objects hold the possibility, even the hope, that the encounter with the technologies of modernity will be a docile one, that the natives will be able to manage—to handle, so to speak—devices that are more likely to work against them. Indeed, in relation to their flying in an airplane, we are later led to believe that they will be flown from Altamira to a labor camp deep in the jungle.



Figure 2



Figure 3

Upon sighting their destination, Lorde Cigano stops the truck, emerges visibly enthusiastic, and, pointing, exclaims: “Altamira! And the river Xingú. That’s the river Xingú.” In the following shot, the troupe is gathered near the truck again and the painting on the door comes into full view. But the hands on the windshield are no longer there. This disappearance of the hands, accompanied by a verbal announcement

of their geographical location, remits to the earlier scene in which the foregrounding of the map displaces the hands. If that scene stages the displacement of the tactics of the body by the abstract strategies of the map, the voyage as a whole now gains similar implications. Thus, in the shot of the sighting of Altamira, we witness the complete removal of the hands from the windshield. Indeed, the arrival will be the culmination of the problems of situation, beginning with the disappointing realization that the town in view is no Amazonian paradise but a bustling place. Madame Salomé, Lorde's companion, is the first to notice the countless television antennae, which are a clear disappointment.

This leads us to the scene that concludes the voyage to Altamira. First we see a close-up of an antenna and then of a television screen, showing no more than vertical, colored stripes. A medium close-up of one of the native elders is quickly followed by a similar shot of one of the children. Judging from their facial expression, the children are underwhelmed. Yet, they seem unable to look away from the TV set. Another shot shows that they are inside a bar and reveals a curious mise-en-scene, which is the culmination of all the elements we have been discussing (Figure 4). In a deeper plane, near the television, on the left of the screen, the native travelers are gathered. Mounted on the wall, on the right, top side of the screen, hangs a map of Brazil, the largest visual element on the scene. The map is marked with two lines, one oriented east to west, another north to south. The east-west one plots the travelers' course on the Trans-Amazonian Highway, while the other line foreshadows the direction they will travel next, on their way to Brasília. Madame Salomé (center right) is at first facing the television but then turns around and takes a couple of steps away, visibly grumpy.

Lorde Cigano morosely leans against a wall (right). What marks this scene is not just the disappointment with a town that is nothing like their expectations. Rather, it is the strange sense of dislocation, the way in which they are emplaced, with their position marked on the map, while feeling displaced and out-of-sorts. The fact that each of them seems isolated in this small space, gathered together while staring in different directions, adds to the strange sense of situation of the scene.



Figure 4

The *Bye bye Brasil* sequence discussed above works as an allegory that makes thinkable distinct modes of understanding and experiencing space, on the one hand as related to maps and territorial capture and on the other to the primarily affective and improvisational sensual experience of inhabiting space. The shift from the troupe's modern-day nomadism to the travel that is integrated in the territoriality of the map may represent a loss. Similarly, the advance of the television and its homogenizing

effects speaks of the loss of a sense of locality—a loss of local sensibilities as all places become united not just by the unifying view of the map but by the fact that people, everywhere, are viewing the same images on TV. If the map imagines a viewing eye that unites territories, the TV unites territories by gathering dispersed visions. The hands that pressed against the windshield as well as the picture on the door of the truck are replaced by the map and the TV—ways of seeing the world that in a sense represent an abandonment of sensorial lived experience, of local and embodied affective territories. Thus, by the time the troupe sights its destination, Altamira, the hands no longer appear on the windshield at all. Shortly after, the truck will be lost—and with it the impressionistic landscape picture on the door. At the end of the film, the troupe has a new vehicle that is decorated with neon lights portraying nude female forms, a cheap appeal to voyeurism.

Nostalgia is palpable in *Bye bye Brazil*, but what does that nostalgia mourn? It certainly mourns for a Brazil that disappears as well as for threatened modes of local experience. In view of the invocation of the hands and their displacement by the map, the film is not just inflected with palpable nostalgia, but also nostalgia for the palpable. Nothing is more local than the body. It may seem strange for the audiovisual to yearn for corporeal experience, but, as I will show, this longing is fertile. Film is, of course, no stranger to the spatial abstractions of cartography, being itself a sort of map that severs and reassembles space. Like a map, film may guide the viewer so that, as Giuliana Bruno notes, one can travel through film—or even embark on it as on a vessel (Bruno 6). Bodies in film also travel courses plotted by narrative and argument, the map of *decoupage* that informs the production of film. Yet, bodies can also

improvise their performance in film space, traveling not according to the directions of abstract schemes but according to moment-by-moment decisions. As in the suggestion of the hands pressed against the windshield, bodies in film can feel their way as they go.

2 – Film Studies and the Sensual Turn

I am proposing, then, that the hands pressed against the screen like surface of the windshield, perceived as an invocation of the immediacy of bodily experience, are an invitation to reconsider the place of the sensuous body in audiovisual media. As if responding to this invitation, visual anthropologist David MacDougall has recently complained that our practices of interpretation deal with “meaning” while failing to respond to “being,” the term he uses to designate the untranslatable corporeality of cinema. Involving the bodies in film, the body of the camera operator, and the bodies of viewers, this corporeality cannot be fully assimilated to narrative, or reduced to semiological signs with retrievable meanings. The notion of the “corporeal image” recognizes in cinema the inscription of the materiality of bodily interactions that are registered in the film but are in excess of meaning-making practices. Cinema’s bodily encounters are sensate occasions, opened to the contingencies of the relation between “matter and feeling” during the “microsecond of discovery . . . knowledge at the birth of knowledge” (3). The challenge is how to respond to cinema’s corporeal invocations, which, like the hands pressed against the windshield, can be easily lost if we walk away with the abstractions of the map. Thus, MacDougall warns, we must

know when “to desist in our interpretation . . . to allow these moments . . . to resonate” (5).

MacDougall’s tentative argument echoes Susan Sontag’s classic *Against Interpretation*. There, she contends that art criticism, inheriting Plato’s notion that material forms are merely imperfect copies of ideas, presumes the subservience of the work’s materiality to a more valuable, extractable content. Practices of interpretation mine the content of form and in so doing attempt to replace the actual work. If meaning is what matters, the work as a material object fulfills its function the moment it is interpreted. The problem, according to Sontag, is partly that this model is inapt to engage with contemporary art, which is sometimes overtly adverse to the idea of being the vehicle of a hidden message or meaning. More importantly, she claims that the modern conditions of life, with “its material plenitude, its sheer crowdedness” (13), as well as the “hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of the energy and sensual capacity” (7), have ultimately dulled human capacity to sense and to feel.⁷ The role of art and consequently of art criticism is not to wrestle meaning away from form but to reawaken our capacity to perceive form, “to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all.” The function of criticism “should be to show *how* [the work of art] *it is what it is*, even *that it is what it is*, rather than to show what it means.” We need not a hermeneutics, but an erotics of art, she concludes (14).

MacDougall and Sontag’s observations can be joined to a chorus of critics

⁷ Here Sontag echoes Benjamin’s notion, perhaps most forcefully expressed in “Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” that the shocks caused by modern technology lead to the numbing of the human sensorium. For remarkable analyses of this aspect of his work, see Susan Buck-Morss “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics,” as well as Miriam Hansen’s “Benjamin’s Aura” and *Cinema and Experience*. I will engage with these texts later in this dissertation.

whose work, though distinct in fundamental ways, participates in what can be called film studies' sensual turn, a renewed "interest in rediscovering [the place of] the material and sensual body" in the experience of cinema (del Río 2). This turn gained particular force in the early 1990s with the publication of influential works by Linda Williams, Stephen Shaviro, and Vivian Sobchack.⁸ In the *Cinematic Body* (1993), Shaviro lays out the stakes by positioning his work in counterpoint to critical practices, hegemonic in the '70s and '80s, that distrust affective and corporeal sensation in the process of evaluation and interpretation.⁹ This often takes the form of suspicion of the image as image (rather than as a signifier of something else) and of visual pleasure. As Shaviro points out, many founding texts of film theory begin with a vow to resist the affective seductions of film—purging sensation for the sake of "scientific" clarity.¹⁰ Thus, Christian Metz describes his project as "an attempt to disengage the cinema-object from the imaginary and to win it for the symbolic, in the hope of extending the latter by a new province" (10). Metz exemplifies theory's tendency to turn against its object, to refuse its seduction in order to master it through

⁸ The differences between these critics are substantial. Williams' work is a revision of genre studies and Sobchack's is an appropriation of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology for cinema. Shaviro's work draws largely from Deleuze and Bataille in a polemic against film studies' submission to semiology and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Yet, these critics' projects are allied insofar as they propose a reevaluation of the place of the sensuous body in film experience and criticism.

⁹ Interestingly, before the institutionalization of film studies in the 1970s, theorists from Münsterberg to Kracauer openly acknowledged the corporeality of cinema. Not surprisingly, the sensual turn that I am describing has also entailed a revisionist reappropriation of classic film studies. Critics considered naïve by the generation working in the '70s and '80s have been reevaluated, as is most notably the case with Bazin and Kracauer.

¹⁰ Sobchack makes a similar claim in *The Address of the Eye*: "The theorist, abstracted from his own embodied experience in the movie theater, describes cinematic vision as an essential entailment of a *viewing subject* and a *viewed object* in what is thought of, rather than lived through, as a *single* and *disembodied* act of vision and signification. Yet, everything about my experience at the movies denies such description" (24, her italics). Thus, like Shaviro, she positions her work in counterpoint to film studies of the 1970s and 1980s by reinserting the sensate body in the center of film experience rather than moving it aside in the service of interpretation.

interpretation. Cinema pleasure turns against itself in a hermeneutical cleansing, so that, as Metz puts it, “voyeuristic sadism [can be] sublimated into epistemophilia” (cited in Shaviro 10). Similarly, Laura Mulvey’s classic essay advocates purging the magic of cinema’s visual pleasure. She states plainly that analysis should destroy pleasure and beauty. Thus she begins her own exorcism—of her affective engagement as well as ours. Despite the value of Mulvey’s essay as a landmark feminist critique of Hollywood cinema, her essay reproduces the pattern by which affective sensations are denied in order to make way for critical thought.

A kind of prudishness seems to inform these disavowals of the sensual, affective body. Reminiscent of what Sontag claimed to be art criticism’s lingering Platonism, these film critics exemplify an all-too-common distrust of the power of the image to affect the body—a power that must be neutralized by exegesis. In a recent article, Rosalind Galt performs an overview of film criticism’s rejection of “pretty” images, a term designating images that are perceived as excessively or gratuitously decorated, and concurs with Sontag and Shaviro by diagnosing that film theory’s “suspicion of the image” is symptomatic of a chronic “iconofobia” (Galt 18).

The sensual turn, pitted against a critical tradition that distrusts the body’s sensations and pleasures, has been primarily interested in vindicating the viewer’s corporeal experience and locating it at the center of the critical practice. Collectively, these works posit a notion of interpretation that does not avoid corporeal experience but seeks, instead, to pass through it. Williams’ revision of genre studies is a compelling illustration. She coins the notion of “body genres” (namely, melodrama, horror, and porn), which refers to genres that thrive on provoking visceral sensations

in the viewer's body homologous to the sensations portrayed by the bodies in the films. Body genres hinge on causing the viewer's body to react—with tears, jolts, or arousal. Thus, Williams arrives at a genre definition by thinking through the affective body rather than by putting it aside. In the process her argument also implies that it is precisely the bodily excesses of certain genres that confound critical opinion, leading to their dismissal as low-brow or gratuitous.

Williams is not alone in her attempt to theorize film in a bodily manner. A sizeable number of scholars contribute to the sensual turn, including Laura Marks, Jennifer Barker, Giuliana Bruno, Brigitte Peucker, Ivone Margulies, and Elena del R  o. In their effort to produce theories that account for the way “cinema is grounded on the material body” (Peucker 5), these critics have developed a sensual critical vocabulary that includes notions like “haptic visuality” (Marks, reappropriating Alois Riegl's term) and “the tactile eye” (Barker, following from Sobchack's phenomenological work). Both of these terms refer to the way the experience of cinema is not one of disembodied viewership, or the oft-decried “gaze,” but rather is full-bodied, engaging, and compelling even one's sense of touch. These terms are also indicative of the way in which these critics have made the bodily experience of the viewer their primary concern, to the point that cinema seems thinkable only in relation to that encounter. Illustrating this, Elena del R  o recasts a familiar riddle: if a film is projected in an empty theater, “does it still make a sound or throw out an image?” (cited in Barker 34) Much as in Sartre's claim that literature only exists as such once the work encounters a reader (in other words, the reader completes what the writer and the writing can only begin), del R  o employs the riddle to suggest that without the

viewer the film as such may not exist at all.¹¹

As will be evident in the following chapters, my consideration of the place of the body in film is in many ways indebted to the scholars of the sensual turn. Yet, I take issue with the degree to which these scholars prioritize the viewer's body. Although such prioritization opens valuable possibilities for film analysis, it also tends to sequester the materiality of cinema at the moment of reception. From the perspective of reception, all films are full of corporeal and affective potential due to the sheer fact that we, embodied beings, cannot encounter the medium otherwise. Thus, Sobchack's work, in polemics with previous theory's dissociation of vision from the sensual body, does not champion or delineate a certain kind of film but articulates what is at stake in film viewing: "Any phenomenological exploration of the sense-making capacity of both human beings and the cinema must begin by refusing to abstract vision from its existential and embodied motility" ("The Active Eye" 21). Similarly, Brigitte Peucker paraphrases Kracauer to claim that the experience of cinema is inherently enmeshed in the sensorial and is never composed of pure sense-making or meaning (5). I agree with these declarations that vision (ours and cinema's) is never truly disembodied and that processes of making sense and the experience of bodily sensations are entwined.

Yet, the emphasis on the embodied viewer can lead to an obfuscation of the fact that not all films are created equal. The eclectic film examples discussed by Shaviro do not constitute a body of work in any regard except the fact that the critic,

¹¹ Sartre's lovely formulation is worth citing: "Since the creation can find its fulfillment only in reading, since the artist must entrust to another the job of carrying out what he has begun . . . all literary work is an appeal" (54). *What is Literature and Other Essays*.

as a viewer, felt like grouping them together. Similarly, Barker's *The Tactile Eye* moves easily between examples as disparate as David Lynch and *Toy Story*, finding in both the occasion for the practice of a sensual reception. Such broad range may demonstrate the applicability of Barker's concept, but one may wonder what the critical value is of a concept so capacious as to permit the inclusion of works that are unlike in every respect, most of all in their mode of production. This is only possible as a result of an emphasis, in my view exaggerated, on the viewer's subjective experience at the moment of reception.

Even Sobchack's sophisticated work at times betrays the dangers of overemphasizing reception. Grounding her reading of *The Piano* not as much in the body as in her own living flesh, she writes: "However intellectually problematic in terms of its sexual and colonial politics, Campion's film moved me deeply, stirring my bodily senses and my sense of my body. The film ... 'sensitized' the very surfaces of my skin—as well as its own—to touch" (*Carnal* 61). Perhaps Sobchack lives up to Sontag's call for an erotics of art criticism. But, as Lúcia Nagib complains, this passage is indicative of the sensual turn's proclivity to moments of self-indulgent impressionism (*World Cinema* 25), to the point that such criticism tells us more about the critic than about her object. In the supple critical voice of writers like Sobchack and Shaviro such self-pleasing erotics are mobilized for well-informed interventions in cultural criticism and film theory.¹² But excessive emphasis on the moment of reception may open a Pandora's box of subjective impressions that in itself cannot be

¹² Shaviro's book specifically intends to show, in counterpoint to semiological or psychoanalytical approaches, that the viewer's pleasure *can* and *should* be part of critique. Similarly, Sobchack intends to establish that viewing cinema, contrary to widespread critical opinion, involves not just vision but the entire body.

the basis of a critical program. This emphasis can lead to confusion between the qualities that pertain to a mode of reception and the qualities that inhere in the cultural object, a confusion that allows Barker to move from the tactility of *Eraserhead* to that of *Toy Story* without skipping a beat.

Umberto Eco makes a pertinent point about the distinction between reception and production in his discussion about the “openness” of what he calls the “open work.” All art works, he writes, are open in the sense that the “addressee is bound to enter into an interplay of stimulus and response which depends on his unique capacity for sensitive reception of the piece.” Each person receives the work differently, according to her own sensibilities, and in this sense participates in its creation. But this fact, Eco continues, cannot prevent us from acknowledging that some works are open in a more fundamental and tangible manner, as in pieces of music that allow the performer to decide the relative duration of each musical note (Eco 2-3). Some works are open not because of a general characteristic of reception but because of a specificity in the way they were produced. Similarly, the reception of audiovisual media is invariably corporeal and involves more than just our vision or aural capacities. But individual films are corporeal in dissimilar ways and it is the critic's task to make these distinctions.

I agree with the sensual turn's invitation to think corporeally and with the idea that the pleasures and sensations of reception must not be ritualistically disavowed in order to make way for critical thought. But this dissertation will place emphasis not on the moment of reception but on the moment of production. In relation to specific practices of production, I will delineate a number of films that are fundamentally

corporeal, as if they too responded to the invocation of the hands pressed against the screen and in so doing displaced the map. At times I will dwell on the sensuality of reception but this sensuality will be connected to specific conditions of production. At other times, the viewer's sensations will not be relevant at all. But all of the films this dissertation will discuss thrive on tactics rather than strategies, on moment-by-moment experience at the moment of filming rather than abstractions of meaning—practices that characterize the cinema of experience.

3 – Representation, Presentation, Experience

In a recent book that develops the notion of “ethical realism” in relation to diverse examples of world cinema, Lúcia Nagib asks: “are all works of art necessarily (or exclusively) representational?” (3) There are those who would, without hesitation, answer that they are not. Rancière, for instance, distinguishes between the representational regime of art, which “understands artistic activity on the model of an active form that imposes itself upon inert matter and subjects it to its representational ends” (Rancière *Film* 117, cited in Nagib 4), and the aesthetic regime wherein art is “a pure instance of suspension, a moment when form is experienced for itself” (Rancière *Politics* 24). The turn from one to the other, Rancière contends, is epochal: while the representational regime begins with Aristotle and holds sway for most of western history, the aesthetic, emerging perhaps with Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind*, signals a modern revolution. From this perspective, the question of modern art is never one of what it *represents* but rather “how it is what it

is, even that it is what it is,” as Sontag phrases it, anticipating Rancière. On the other hand, for many critics, cultural analysis relies on the notion of representation. The outstanding work of Robert Stam, particularly important in the reception of Brazilian cinema in the English-speaking world, has productively inquired into the relationships between history, politics, and cinema as mediated through the concept of representation, a term whose connotations “are at once religious, esthetic, political, and semiologic” (Shohat and Stam 182). In contrast to Rancière, Stam seems to presume that the work of art is inevitably representational and must be approached as such.

In my view, it would be unproductive to subscribe to totalizing statements about whether cinema is representational or non-representational in an absolute sense. Rather, we should provide working definitions for “representation” and related terms while simultaneously acknowledging their situational value. Works imagine distinct relationships with the lived world and demand, therefore, different kinds of concepts and attention. Nagib seems to follow from a similar premise when, in the process of defining her idea of “ethical realism,” she defines first the terms “representational” and “presentational,” imagined not as ontological characteristics of cinema but as distinct and coexisting modes.

Drawing from the work of Noel Burch, Nagib claims that representational cinema attempts to create the impression of a diegetic reality and, in so doing, erases all the traces of production. In other words, representational cinema wants to create the sensation that it displays a complete and self-enclosed world existing independently of cinema, its technologies, and its means of representation. Conversely, she notes that

for Burch cinema is presentational insofar as it shows itself *as* cinema rather than a self-enclosed diegesis. An emblematic gesture of the presentational is the actor's direct gaze at the camera, which breaks with one of the founding injunctions of representational film (Nagib 4-5). I agree with Nagib that Tom Gunning's work on early cinema complements this model by providing another conceptualization of the presentational. His concept of the "cinema of attractions" refers to non-narrative practices of early film in which bodies bluntly present themselves to the viewer (for instance, the vaudeville acts of Edison's motion picture company). This is not a cinema of voyeurism, Gunning states, differentiating his work from the work of Christian Metz, but of exhibitionism. This is a cinema "willing to rupture the self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator" (Gunning 57).

After establishing this understanding of representational and presentational possibilities, Nagib introduces the notion of "ethical realism," a term I find interesting but problematic. Ethical realism describes a cinema that seeks immersion in and exposure to the lived world so that even fictional scenes are the occasion for physical experiences and events. "Physical acting," a central element of ethical realism, is a "film event" and "relates to contingency rather than narrative mimesis, with presentation of reality as it happens, rather than representation, and this is where commitment translates into ethics" (32). In physical acting the actors undergo rather than represent experiences. Such is the case with the strenuous running scene in *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001). Similarly, Herzog's films often entail the director's and actors' physical immersion in the experience represented, to the point

that *Fitzcarraldo*'s epic quest of moving a three-story steamboat over a mountain in order to place it on another river is actually performed during the making of the film.¹³ This implies a level of commitment on the part of all people involved that goes well beyond the necessities of representation.

Although my own approach has affinity with Nagib's, sharing its "focus on production and address" (24), I want to revise the terms of the discussion starting with "ethical realism." One can question the aptness of the term "realism," as it can designate the practices by which cinema causes the impression of reality and exists, therefore, in the domain of representational film. As for ethics, Nagib herself recognizes that, more often than not, the term refers to the guiding principles and consequences of artistic practices (10).¹⁴ Understood as such, ethics tends to operate on a distinct temporality than the one Nagib intends, being preoccupied with the before and the after (principles and consequences) rather than experience at the moment of production, upon which the notion of "realist ethics" rests. These problems of nomenclature are of course not insurmountable or unproductive. It is clear that Nagib intends to recast the terms and reclaim them from their other connotations. In the case of realism, she adds to recent revisions of the term by critics, such as Ivone Margulies, whose phrase "rites of realism" refers to a corporeal realism also conceptually tethered to the reality of production. "Rites" because these "representations . . . have actual effects on reality, particularly the reality of the

¹³ See Les Blank's *The Burden of Dreams* (1982) for a documentation of the making of *Fitzcarraldo* (1982).

¹⁴ By this logic Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* would fair rather poorly. The director's obsession with enacting the protagonist's adventures caused a few deaths.

profilmic bodies” (Margulies 1).¹⁵ As for ethics, Nagib joins Rancière in his dismissal of recent uses of the term as an equivalent for morals, “a general instance of normativity enabling one to judge the validity of practices and discourses operative in distinct spheres of judgment and action” (*Dissensus* 184). Still, considering the elaborations of representational and presentational cinemas with which Nagib begins her argument, “ethical realism” is not a particularly useful third term. Both representational and presentational films can demonstrate a realist ethics, which, as she understands it, depends ultimately on the participants’ commitment to physical experience at the moment of production, regardless of their intended effects on the viewer.

For these reasons, I propose “experiential cinema” as a third term of the triad. The representational, presentational, and experiential are not pure categories but modes that can mutually contaminate or coexist in a single film. These modes emerge from distinct relationships between cinema and the world and entail different practices of production. In the representational mode cinema mediates between a “reality,” fictional or not, and the viewer. I agree with Burch that narrative cinema typically deploys a representational realism that elides the means of representation in order to produce verisimilitude. In my understanding, however, the category is broader. Documentaries, too, can attempt a representation of reality, a mimesis understood as an accurate reproduction of the world or some aspect thereof. Documentaries can be

¹⁵ She also deploys Fredric Jameson’s idea of oppositional realism, which “refers to films and film movements that present at the same time the self-referentiality of modernist art and the epistemological retrieval of a marginal reality” (11).

even more invested in the reproduction of the real. Finally, some fiction films may not subscribe to the rules of classic Hollywood cinema but may still be highly representational. The *cinema novo* of Glauber Rocha, for instance, tends to be packed with allegories, so that individual characters and events represent sweeping historical categories and events. The viewer of such films would not be out of turn in attempting a conceptual interpretation. In all cases of the representational mode, the forethought that regulates production leaves little room for contingencies that could emerge in the moment of filming. The temporality of the representational favors the "before" of planning and the "after" of reception. In the *Bye bye Brasil* sequence I analyzed above the representational has most affinity with the map, suggestive of the conceptual plan that organizes the film as well as the abstractions of interpretation.

In the presentational mode the moment of filming can become substantially more important. Here, bodies and things are not intended as signs but present themselves physically to the apparatus. The presentational is illustrated in the exhibitionist acts of strong men and cabaret dancers of early cinema. It is also a favorite of the avant-garde, with its interest in the plasticity of materials, as illustrated by Man Ray's *Retour à la raison* (1923), in which we are presented with the textures of nails and shavings that were placed directly against the negative¹⁶ and a nude female torso patterned by the light refracted through a window shade. Of the three modes, the presentational is the most invested in the materiality of the image and the most resistant to translation into meaning—unless that meaning is located on the image's refusal to signify. In the *Bye bye Brasil* sequence this mode is evoked by the

¹⁶ A technique of filming without a camera, used by Man Ray and other Dadaists and usually called a "photogram."

hands pressed against the windshield. In Chapter 3 we will look at the way the close-up of moving hands in João Salles' *Santiago*, made by the request of the retired butler who is the subject of the documentary, emerges as a presentational assertion of the body against the representational control of the director.

The hands on the windshield, however, are also suggestive of experiential cinema, the mode primarily interested in the experiencing body at the moment of filming. Experiential films do not intend to represent a pre-arranged narrative, argument, or independently existing reality. Rather, they create conditions of experience enabled by cinema's productive process, by the encounter of bodies and filmmaking technologies. In part, this amounts to openness to contingencies at the moment of production. It is precisely this openness that the first chapter will explore. Titled "Handling Contingency," the chapter examines Bodansky and Senna's *Iracema: Uma transa Amazônica* (1974),¹⁷ a landmark film that plays at the border of representational and experiential practices. In *Iracema*, bodies are not managed in the service of representation but provoked to react to the arrival of the camera, invited to improvise performances and occupy the space of the film. The purpose of the chapter is twofold. First, it approaches the film as an antecedent to later examples of the cinema of experience, providing an original perspective on this often cited but understudied work. Second, the chapter further develops some of the categories useful in the consideration of experiential films, including Michel de Certeau's notions of strategy and tactics, as well as contingency, with which cinema as a medium has special affinity.

¹⁷ Although completed in 1974, the film was censored in Brazil and had to wait until 1980 for an official release.

The following chapter, titled “Migrations of Affect,” turns to examples that go well beyond *Iracema*’s openness to contingency. The chapter focuses on three films by Eduardo Coutinho: *Cabra marcado para morrer* (started in 1964, completed in 1984), *Boca de Lixo* (1993), and *Peões* (2004), films whose investment in the moment of production is partly manifested in the way they proceed without a map, setting up situations while remaining open to the outcomes that moment-by-moment experience brings. More interestingly, these three films include scenes of viewing at the moment of filming, inquiring into the power of images to affect not a viewer in a belated scene of reception but rather those participating in the moment of production. In other words, the experiential possibilities of cinema are not limited to people’s encounter with the camera or their interaction with a scene of viewing but can include interactions between bodies and their images taking place as they are filmed. Techniques of reproduction are insistently turned towards immediate production in a way that suggests that cinema is a useful reservoir of bodily affect and memory. If the cinema of representation uses bodies to produce meaning, these films attempt the opposite by inviting bodies to make use of cinema.

By including films whose production spans four decades, the second chapter will not only give perspective on Coutinho’s outstanding work, but will afford the opportunity of a simultaneous reflection on the transformations of media technology. Starting with celluloid, moving to video, and culminating in digital means of recording, the films illustrate the way the evolving audiovisual technology is incorporated by the cinema of experience. Contrary to claims about the dematerialization of the media and even the end of the relevance of media specificity,

the chapter will show how the changing technology does not announce the end but the renewal of opportunities to explore the corporeality of cinema and the imbrications of images and the lived, material world.

Chapter Three draws out some of the implications of the previous chapters in order to approach recent developments in Brazilian film, particularly the growing preponderance of the middle-class apartment as cinema's setting. As the chapter argues, the cinema of experience can be understood as the yielding of authorial power, which entails the rejection of broad perspectives and history writ-large in favor of localized experiential encounters. As such, the move to an ever-smaller scale is aligned with the development of the experiential sensibility. The chapter mentions many examples but focuses on João Salles' *Santiago* (2007), Coutinho's *Edifício Master*, and Cao Guimarães' *Rua de mão dupla* (2004) in order to show the entanglements of film production and lived experience as they unfold in the personal apartment site. These increasingly collaborative examples culminate in Cao's film, in which the participants have absolute control over the production of images.

As will become clear in the following chapters, the cinema of experience is not just a category of theoretical interest but is essential for the appreciation of a significant part of contemporary Brazilian film production. This dissertation opts for depth rather than breadth of analysis and focuses on the work of only a handful of filmmakers. But their work illustrates a broader trend that implies substantial reconfigurations of the aesthetics and politics of contemporary cinema. In the conclusion, I will mention relatable examples in recent film production and inquire into the horizons of the cinema of experience. By favoring the here and now of the

moment of production, these films operate at the limits of cinema as we know it, on the border between its reinvention and dissolution.

Chapter One

Handling Contingency:

Tactics, Tactility, and the Unmanaged Borders of *Iracema: Uma Transa Amazônica*

A landmark of Brazilian cinema, *Iracema: Uma transa Amazônica* (1974), by Orlando Senna and Jorge Bodansky, remains an underexplored film. This fiction-documentary hybrid is a rich reflection on territoriality, mobility, and borders—borders that are inherently paradoxical, limits constituted by contact, lines of division drawn by virtue of the possibility of their crossing, at once the place of differentiation and confusion between bodies or territories, as Michel de Certeau once noted.¹⁸ The “porousness” of borders is potently suggested in the film’s title, starting with the recasting of the name “Iracema,” which, taken from a nineteenth-century indigenous character in a romantic novel by José de Alencar, is moved across time as well as across the border between one medium and another. The name, an anagram of “America,” is also latent with resignification through the crossing over of its letters. More importantly, the title puns on the name of the Trans-Amazonian Highway by taking the prefix *trans*, which already suggests moving over or across, and modifying it into *transa*, Brazilian slang, derived from the word for “transaction,” which usually refers to illicit or informal exchanges and bargains as well as to the sexual act. The semantic field invoked by the title, then, invites us from the start to think about

¹⁸ On the “paradox” of the frontier, he writes: “created by contacts, the points of differentiation between two bodies are also their common points . . . The theoretical and practical problem of the frontier: to whom does it belong?” (127).

mobility and acts of crossing over, exchange, commerce, and even skin-to-skin contact.

This chapter inquires into limits and crossings as they operate simultaneously in *Iracema*'s location in the territory of the Trans-Amazonian Highway, its mixed cinematic practice, and ultimately our own critical analysis, which brings the film across a border of signification to be described and critiqued in writing. The film's play at the border of nonfiction and fiction—moving between a documentary style that seeks to stay close to the contingencies of everyday life and the construction of a narrative with allegorical overtones—to a large extent coalesces into a sociopolitical critique of the effects of the highway on the Amazonian region. Although the highway was ostensibly designed to integrate the Amazon into the national territory, the images displayed in *Iracema* are less about integration than about the movement and displacement of people and the invasive and destructive appropriation of material resources. The film's invocation of cinematic borders (between the documentary and the fictional) gives occasion to practices of invasion and appropriation, thus filmically mimicking and drawing attention to the sociopolitical processes it critiques. While explaining and acknowledging this analogy (which in some ways has been addressed by Ismail Xavier's reading of the film but will be reconsidered here and undergo an inversion of priorities), I will also argue that the ensuing transactions between real bodies and abstract meanings exceed this initial function and place not just film practice but our own critique at a crossroads between making sense of the image on the one hand and, on the other, engaging with it in a sensorial, corporeal manner. In other words, a critical reading of the film is not a zero sum transaction but one that

leaves remainders that must be accounted for through a critical *handling* rather than a *reading*—as I will develop in dialogue with de Certeau’s notion of tactics as well as with theories about the place of the experiencing body in the “everyday” and in film.

De Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* invites a turn in critical attention from author and text towards the reader, from places and those who design and control them towards their inhabitants, from processes of production properly speaking towards practices of use and consumption—in other words, it is an invitation to a shift in attention from places where agency is clearly and authoritatively located toward places where its presence and exercise are splintered and diffuse. This shift marks a movement across the interface between the macro structures of power and the micro level of experience, which are represented, in de Certeau’s book, by texts and their readers, places and their inhabitants. More importantly, de Certeau is concerned with the manner in which structures of power are used and redirected by what he calls the practices of everyday life. These are border practices in the sense that they take place at points of contact and resistance wherein users, readers, and inhabitants, however furtively and minutely, perform a secondary process of production. This second process is, therefore, a creative one, an invention, as the original title of the book—*L’invention du quotidien*—indicates.

De Certeau’s book mobilizes a conceptual vocabulary that enables forms of critical thinking on the intersections of textual and spatial experiences, and it is for this very reason productive to think not just about *Iracema* but about film in general. Seeking to articulate the interactions between structures and experience, between “texts” (used in an inclusive sense) and the practices of use, de Certeau proposes

interacting categories of place and space, proper and improper, strategy and tactics—categories that are not self-contained, stable opposites but interactive as they engage in dynamic lines of possible contact, redirection, and reinvention. "Place" designates spatial and textual structures (as well as infrastructures, in de Certeau's spatio-textual analysis) while "space" refers to the appropriation of these structures through practices of use and inhabitation. Closely associated with place and space, "proper" and "improper" are resonant words connoting at once ideas of authority, property, and propriety. Moreover, the "proper" is proper to power, its institutions and authoritative operations of understanding, administering, controlling, and containing the "improper." As de Certeau explains, the proper serves "to generate relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, 'clienteles,' 'targets,' or 'objects' of research)" (xix). Designating a quality that applies to a "marginal" but ever-growing majority, the improper is this "exterior" that the techniques of the proper attempt to order, administer, and contain. Finally, de Certeau designates these techniques of the proper "strategies," to which he opposes "tactics"—that is, the surreptitious ways in which the weak, "always on the watch . . . continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them" (xix).¹⁹

Bodansky and Senna's film, which takes place on the territory opened by the

¹⁹ In this sense, the propositions of *Practice* are not unique but bear comparison with a number of similar, contemporaneous projects, such as Deleuze's counterpointing of "smooth" and "striated" spaces, the "molar" and the "molecular," along with the notion of "deterritorialization." The situationists' concept of *détournement* is also similar. Debord and Wolman's 1956 document "A User's Guide to *Détournement*" begins with the following: "Every reasonably aware person of our time is aware of the obvious fact that art can no longer be justified as a superior activity, or even as a compensatory activity to which one might honorably devote oneself. The reason for this deterioration is clearly the emergence of productive forces that necessitate other production relations and a new practice of life." Although here is not the place to pursue an in-depth comparison of de Certeau's propositions with similar ones such as these, their kinship is undeniable and the situationist quote reads almost as an epigraph to *Practice*.

Trans-Amazonian Highway upon its inauguration in 1972, concerns a massive spatial procedure thinkable in terms of the strategies of the proper—that is, the national government’s strategy to incorporate and control a region that was in effect exterior, “distinct from it.” The consequences of this operation on the marginal majority (among them displaced indigenous peoples, migrant workers, and impoverished women and children) are immense, including the paradoxical multiplication of the “improper” in all its connotations. *Iracema* visually documents the manner in which the opening of the region to capitalist forms of ownership and exploitation is accompanied by widespread dispossession and poverty. Also, the assertion of the authority of the national government’s control in the region gives rise to the multiplication of forms of illegality, of improper-ness. Significantly, the film’s protagonist (to the extent that this only faintly narrative film has a protagonist) is a young roadside prostitute, quintessentially improper in her dispossession as well as in the legal marginality of her trade. Even her proper name—normally a form of legitimacy of the “proper” person—seems to not take hold with her, as the male protagonist of the story forgets and mixes it, calling her by another indigenous name, “Jurema.” Although these thematic analogies between *Iracema* and *Practice* are relevant, providing some grounds of comparison, there are more important reasons for placing the two in dialogue that go beyond what de Certeau’s categories can contribute to our understanding of the film. This dialogue will reveal the potentially cinematic aspects of de Certeau’s work as well as the way in which some of its fundamental limitations can be addressed by relocating the reflection from writing to cinema.

In a particularly pregnant passage about the idea of inhabitation, the way in

which a text, a place, or a structure is made inhabitable by tactics, de Certeau writes:

[The reader] insinuates into another person's text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralizes himself in it like the internal rumblings of one's body. . . . The thin film of writing becomes a movement of strata, a play of spaces. A different world (the reader's) slips into the author's place.

This mutation makes the text inhabitable, like a rented apartment (xxi).

The inhabitant of the text is compared to a renter who rearranges the text from within.

The manner in which the text is inhabited, described as a slippage on the "thin film of writing," a movement of strata, is suggestive of the juxtaposition of the semi-transparent celluloid stock, or of a cinematic superimposition of images. It is, moreover, paradoxically intangible and material: the visceral "rumblings," taking place deep in the interior of a body are, by virtue of their involuntary and only semi-self-aware nature, a sort of outside housed within. In the textual inhabitation, these rumblings are those of a sly but active intruder, the tactician, who momentarily rearranges the interior of the text.

The materiality suggested by the reference to the "rumblings of the body" is not the effect of a single passing metaphor but finds echoes throughout de Certeau's text. While the strategies of the proper are farsighted, the practices of tacticians are invented in the moment and, therefore, their operations always coincide with their bodily location, experience, and performance. Whatever a tactic wins, "it does not keep" (xix). The proper, by contrast, is not bound to the corporeal presence and the temporal present but strives, through its strategies, to administer the open potentiality of space and to produce lasting products that have long-term existence beyond their moment of production. The design and construction of infrastructures or the

production of texts are examples. Thus, the proper is “a victory of space over time.” The tactics of the improper, on the other hand, reasserts the viability of time within its proper place, injecting in it a plurality that turns it back into space. Tactics take “the form of decision itself, the act and manner in which opportunity is seized” (xix).

The coincidence of the tacticians’ practices with their “in the moment” corporeal experience in part explains the logic by which de Certeau’s text, as if allowing the acoustic resonance between the words “tactics” and “tactility” to result in the cross-fertilization of their meanings, performs a subtle but noticeable association between tactics and non-visual perception. Although the text does not rely on a stable binary between visual versus non-visual, it occasionally counterpoints the farsightedness of vision (a sense which in fact depends on distance for its discerning operation) with the physical proximity, contact, and confusion of the other senses—particularly touch.²⁰ This counterpoint establishes a sensorial analogy between vision (the most authoritative of the senses in Western culture) with the strategies of the proper and tactility with the tactics of the everyday. Regarding the crowd walking the streets, de Certeau writes: “They cannot be counted because each unit has a qualitative character: a style of tactile apprehension and kinesthetic appropriation. Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities” (96).

This affirmation of the singularity of the practices of the “swarming mass” can be made particularly significant with reference to what Glissant, in *The Poetics of Relation*, describes as the right to opacity. Opacity, as opposed to transparency,

²⁰ As Martin Jay points out in *Downcast Eyes*, de Certeau performs a critique of modernity’s scopic regime which bears comparison with the critiques by a generation of thinkers who saw the implicit workings of power in “the totalizing gaze from afar” (582). Foucault’s panopticon is a case in point.

represents resistance to the penetration by vision and a refusal of complete legibility or mastery by knowledge. The opaque, although a visual term, is imminently tactile: “Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand this truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components” (190). Viewed as an interweaving of singularities that will never completely relinquish their “essence,” as the mutual contact of surfaces irreducible to one another, the right to opacity is the preamble for a qualitatively distinct type of engagement from that performed by the “proper” and its operations. Rather than mastery, the interweaving of opacities speaks of proximity and mutual vulnerability. Similarly to Glissant, de Certeau describes the tacticians’ experience of space as one of mutuality rather than mastery: “These practitioners make use of space that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other’s arms” (93). Far from the distance of observation, the sensual practices of the everyday are erotic in the sense that they represent the entanglement between bodies and world in excess of any operations of containment by the “proper.”

The sensual suggestiveness of de Certeau’s language, however, is a rhetorical caress on the contours of the intangible. In a recurring self-diagnosis, the text frequently acknowledges what may be its constitutive impossibility—that is, de Certeau’s intention to delineate the practices that by definition elude and redirect authorial intent. To put it another way, to develop a critical approach to such practices is dangerously strategic, an operation of the proper. De Certeau’s “proper text” approaches what is exterior to it, practices that escape textual containment.

Thus, the author’s attempt to articulate an approach to the tactics of the

inhabitants of everyday life is punctuated by the concession of the impossibility that haunts the project. These tactics, de Certeau concedes, take place “without points where one can take hold of them, without rational transparency . . . impossible to administer” (95). At the very opening of the book he dedicates the project to the ordinary man, who, though “common” and “ubiquitous,” is a slippery and “absent figure” to the point that the text’s attention turns away from its ostensive subject toward its own longing: “I inquire into the desire whose impossible object he represents.” De Certeau’s text, then, rehearses a missed encounter with the inhabitants of the everyday. While conceptually elaborating the manner in which these tacticians operate and providing a suggestive vocabulary for speaking of their practices, *Practice* remains a conflicted textual proper-place interested only in the operations that would subvert and violate the integrity that is constitutive of it as a book, a written study. The text, therefore, betrays a sense of incompleteness, advancing by allusions and suggestions rather than by accomplishments—which, as Ian Buchanan notes, results in its dismissal by many critics.²¹ But such incompleteness is not just an opportunity for a deconstructive reading that would disarm the text and return it to the shelf, its possibilities exhausted. It is also an open invitation to take the loose threads of its intention and weave them into other situations. In a sense, the incompleteness and potentiality of the text amount to the manner in which its form is truest to its content.

The history of cinema and film theory is marked by recurring engagements with the practices of everyday life, recurring plunges into the opaque interweaving of lived experience. De Certeau’s elusive “ordinary man” is a returning protagonist in

²¹ See, for instance, Buchanan’s introduction to the section “Other People: Ethnography and Social Practice,” in *The Certeau Reader*.

cinema, appearing as the nameless figure walking out of the factory or at the train station in the Lumière *actualités* and peering out with intensity from Soviet montage films. The “ordinary man” returns in full force in Italian neo-realism as well as in the experiments of direct cinema in North America and *cinéma vérité* in France during the 1960s. Moreover, these inhabitants of the everyday are the primary concern of some of today’s leading *auteurs*, such as Abbas Kiarostami in Iran, Lisandro Alonso in Argentina, and Eduardo Coutinho in Brazil. In the Brazilian case, film critic César Guimarães has pointed to a recent return of the “homem ordinário,” who emerges not as a representative of a group or class or as the object of the spectacularization of ordinary life that prevails in reality TV and journalism but rather in counterpoint to these: the ordinary person “as a field of singularities” (Guimarães 85). *Iracema* is a particularly interesting precedent to this turn to the ordinary in part because it produces a heightened tension between the human body as a signifier of authorial intentional meaning and as a singular opacity operating outside or in the interstices of the structures of signification. To put it differently, the film thrives on the interaction between the operations of textual management and the emergence of unmanaged contingencies.

The recurrence of de Certeau’s “impossible object” in *Iracema* is not an identical occurrence in two different media: film differs fundamentally from the written text in its potential to approach the everyday. On the one hand, film can be seen as a textual proper place as it performs elaborate operations of spatial management—from the authorial decision of what to shoot to the control of mise-en-scene and the final (re)construction of space on the editing table. On a cognitive level,

these spatial operations are as violent as any other strategy of the proper: they accomplish nothing less than the dismembering and reassembling of the continuity of the world. Yet, film is a uniquely potent medium with which to engage the world's tacticians. In this respect, there is a differential between cinema and other forms of representation (such as writing) that, in various guises, has been periodically articulated by film theory. Although film is an audiovisual medium, the celluloid is akin to a hypersensitive skin that registers traces of the world, imprints of the fleeting presence of bodies. As such, the filmic image is, to varying degrees, a document of diffuse authorship, the tensed interface inflected by the structuring operations of the proper as well as by the moment-by-moment emergence of the improper.

Early theorists of film and photography, focusing on the technological specificity of the media, suggested that because the celluloid image is produced by the combination of photo-chemical processes with the material presence of the object represented, it inherently exceeds authorial intentions. Sigfried Kracauer argued that film was substantially different from other arts such as literature and painting because, in the latter, while real-life materials may be a source of inspiration, they disappear in the artist's intentions: "However realistic minded," such artists overwhelm "physical reality" (300). Film, on the other hand, can return the material world to us. Bazin makes a similar observation in "The Ontology of the Photographic Image." The technology of the "sensitized plate," he writes, frees the image from the shadow of the authorial hand for the first time. While all arts depend on the presence and work of an artist, the photographic image derives advantage precisely from his relative absence: "The personality of the photographer enters into the proceedings only in the selection

of the object to be photographed and by way of the purpose he has in mind” (13). Of course Bazin’s minimizing of the importance of the choice and purpose of the artist (which determines what is filmed, from what angle, for what duration, etc.) is an easy point of contention. But the argument that the reproduction technology of the “sensitized plate” sets the photographic image apart from previous forms of representation has withstood even the most skeptical assault of post-structuralism.²² Walter Benjamin, who unlike Kracauer and Bazin is not usually accused of naïveté, suggests that cinema brought about a renewal of the visual world beyond authorial intention. Film, argues Benjamin, reveals an optical unconscious in the same way that Freudian psychoanalysis reveals the “instinctual unconscious.” “Our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories seemed to close relentlessly around us,” he writes in a famous passage of the “Work of Art” essay. Then, a vast, unexpected world was revealed, split open by the dynamite of the split second (265-66).²³

These considerations by no means amount to a claim that cinema grants unmediated access to “reality”—as a clear *window* or as a non-distorting mirror held

²² After having been dismissed as naïve realists, both Bazin and Kracauer have been retrieved by recent theory. In relation to Kracauer, his notion of cinema as the redemption of physical reality was dismissed even at the time of the publication of *Theory of Film* (Hansen “Introduction” ix). It is striking to me that his critics have leapt at the idea that film presents reality as evidence of naïveté but missed the more interesting part of his thesis: reality needs to be “redeemed” by media because it cannot be sufficiently grasped in any other way. For nuanced recent approaches see Brigitte Peucker’s *The Material Image: Cultural Memory in the Present*, as well as Miriam Hansen’s work.

²³ I should note that, for Benjamin, this discovery of the optical unconscious is not just a result of the camera’s mechanical recording—which works independently and beyond the intention of the cameraperson. This discovery also results from the possibilities of montage as well as from the camera’s ability to expand small things to unprecedented sizes (in a notion that echoes Balasz’ claim that the close-up is a rediscovery of a world familiar and yet unknown to the eye). Here I am most interested in the mechanical operation as the condition of possibility for the emergence of an image of diffused authorship.

up to the world, as two recurring tropes would have it.²⁴ Rather, what is at issue is the fact that film emerges from the interaction between “the conscious eye of the director and the unconscious eye of the camera,” an interaction that constitutes cinema’s double power, according to Jacques Rancière (*Film 9*). Because of this double power, cinema is always potentially in excess and, at least to some extent, beyond the control of authorial intentions. Without dismissing the enormous role of filmmakers, then, we can state that cinema is an unusual textual proper place, if it is a proper place at all. Like the book in de Certeau’s reflections, the filmic text is an authorial product that is *a posteriori* used, inhabited, and transformed by practitioners such as ourselves—that is, the viewers. But because of its “double power,” authorship and agency are dispersed in the space of cinema from the outset. The camera, although used by discriminating operators, is an indiscriminating device that registers all things that come within its view, both intended and unintended, managed and unmanaged.

To approach film with this notion in mind is to become aware of the volatile nature of the objects and bodies in the image—the way they may emerge as pure objects, not contained in a chain of signification but shining “with the splendor of the insignificant,” as Rancière writes, paraphrasing one of Flaubert’s unfulfilled literary ambitions (*Film 10*). The presence, movement, and expression of the bodies in film, when in excess of semiosis, emerge as opaque potentialities and are significant precisely in the way they resist signification. Some films dwell in and expand this

²⁴ I should note that the tropes of the window and the mirror are not exclusive to film but were already in the dreams of nineteenth century realist writers. Further, in film, the mirror is not just mobilized in realist discourse but is a key trope of psychoanalytical film theory referring to the Lacanian mirror stage and the formation of the subject. For a critique of the psychoanalytical approach, see Shaviro’s *The Cinematic Body*. For an outstanding analysis of the frame as window, see Friedberg’s *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft*.

zone of indetermination so that (even before we, as viewers, inhabit and repotentialize their textual space) they are hyper-pluralized, crowded by the rumblings of surreptitious intruders.

2 – The Body in the Mirror and the Double Power of Film

The double power of film manifests itself in a brief but complex shot in *Iracema* in which the protagonist sits at a vanity desk in a small intimate room (the only intimate space in the entire film). The camera—which has backed its way down a narrow corridor just ahead of Iracema’s friend—pauses at the threshold and looks towards the protagonist at roughly a 30 degree angle along the horizontal axis. Iracema’s friend, in a move that repeats in many other moments during the film, passes so close to the camera that she causes the impression of physical contact. After these maneuvers, we witness a scene that is ironically reminiscent of the vanity portrait painting tradition—the immortalized view of a wealthy woman, her precious objects, and a mirror, at once the symbol of vanity and a metaphor for the task of the artist. But here the woman is not a rich patron but an Amazonian girl in cheap underwear, sitting in the questionable comfort of a wooden shack as she prepares to work the streets. The objects displayed also represent an odd assortment: unglamorous beauty products, a can of beer, a religious image, and a poster just above the table with undecipherable images but a clear, exclamatory text, which reads: “Look who has arrived.” The exclamation is telling, as the scene uses the threshold and the

indiscriminate reflectivity of the mirror to evidence the way that the film occasions countless unexpected encounters.

The upper body that momentarily appears reflected in the mirror is likely to escape the eye of the viewer. Also, one may very well assume that the lightly clad torso in the reflection is Iracema's body and thus not focus on the fragment of the image at all. Again reminiscent of vanity portraiture, what appears in the reflection is not the woman's but another body entirely—a body that is not in the scene filmed but in the scene of filming. We may infer that we see the torso of the sound technician or of another member of the crew. The angle of the camera, we realize as an afterthought, makes it impossible for us to see Iracema's reflection. As indiscriminate in its task as the recording device, the mirror aligns with the camera to register the fragment of a material presence that most films diligently erase. This illustrates the workings of Benjamin's "dynamite of the split second," splintering the world to reveal more than we expect to see, more than the directorial vision intends.



Figure 1 - The body in the mirror.

In most narrative films such a slippage would amount to a technical flaw, a tear in the film's textual fabric that would betray its process of production and thus denaturalize the realism of the diegesis, breaking the spell of realist representation. As such, it would deserve little more attention than a footnote. But most films labor to tame the camera's lack of discrimination. From the decisions about what to shoot to the procedures at the editing table, the process of *découpage* can be described as a concerted effort to discipline and harness the savage potential of the recording device.²⁵ This effort is intensely practiced in studio filmmaking and through the

²⁵ As Noel Burch explains, the French word *découpage* refers both to the pre-filming breakdown of shots and sequences and to the underlying structure of the finished film. See his discussion of the term in "Spatial and Temporal Articulations" in *Post-War Cinema and Modernity: A Film Reader*.

classical rules of continuity editing, but this is not its exclusive domain. Other cinemas also employ rules and systems of representation to harness the raw potentiality of the recording device, thus attempting to fully appropriate a machine with a penchant for gleaning bits of the improper through the intersections of serendipity and light, rather than authorial forethought. Closely related to this, there is a curious paradox that inflects our experience of film: when it is tightly constructed, we tend to experience the diegesis as the *re*-presentation of a real, natural world, but if it reveals its seams we become estranged and tend to experience it as a textual construct. In part what is at stake in this opposition is the implied referentiality of film. When cinema hides its processes of production it creates the impression that it refers to an existing world—the screen, then, is akin to an open window or a mirror held up to that world. Conversely, when cinema exhibits its process of production, it gives the impression that it is a purely self-referential text—and the screen becomes akin to a mirror reflecting cinema's invented dreams.

But film practice and criticism must not subscribe exclusively to one of these stark possibilities, and *Iracema* dwells precisely in the space of confusion and synergy between the two models—that is, on the one hand, film as a produced text, invested with authorial intentions, and, on the other hand, film as an open space of diffuse authorship and agency made possible by the camera. In other words, the interaction between place and space that de Certeau's text strives to describe is palpably present here, thanks to cinema's double power. In the vanity scene, the camera's placement at a threshold is not just the result of practicality (the question of choosing the best place from which, in this small room, to film the protagonist) but is resonant with the film's

exploration of the founding ambiguity of cinema that places it, as a medium, on the threshold of expected as well as unexpected encounters and contacts.

In light of these observations, the scene makes concrete one of the main characteristics of cinema that has particular force in this film. Figuratively speaking, Bodansky's camera is always at a doorway, susceptible at all times to the exclamation of surprise at its arrival, as expressed by the poster.²⁶ The potential for interaction between forethought and chance is similarly a constant. Moreover, the scene shows that, although insufficient, the metaphors of the window and the mirror are not entirely inapt. A combination of the two is needed, however, because *Iracema* at once offers a view of the lived world and acknowledges its own presence. Further, the non-coincidence of gazes in the shot is suggestive in ways that other scenes will confirm. Iracema, sitting before the mirror is not looking at her own image (and will not, except for brief instants in the duration of the scene) but rather back towards the direction of her friend and the other participants of the scene of filming that the reflection in the mirror betrays. Our own looking into the mirror does not return to us another's gaze but a fragment of a body—shining in the “splendor of the insignificant,” in Rancière's phrase. This “insignificant” is paradoxically fertile with a different sort of signification that does not refer back to the proper and its administrative operations but instead to the point of their momentary rupture. The bodies accused in the shot are not managed by a removed, administrating view but are present in a physical, sensual proximity that the gazes of passers-by, later in the film, will accentuate rather than contain.

Let's suppose that, making a reasonable objection to my attention to the

²⁶ Jorge Bodansky is the director of photography as well as co-director of the film.

strange body in the mirror, the reader suggests that this “intrusion” of the body is not an accident but the result of authorial intention. I find this possibility less likely only because, should the appearance in the mirror have been intentional, I presume the shot would have lasted a few seconds longer to ensure its recognition and effect.

Nevertheless, even if it were intentional, the intrusion would remain ambiguous and could be described as an intentional inscription of cinema’s potential to exceed intentional design. It would be a sign placed to signify the non-sign, an acknowledgement of the medium’s affinity with the contingent trace. One way or another, the reflection in the mirror cannot but be the point that puts tension on the image—comparable to what Barthes describes in photography as the *punctum*, the element with the potential to disturb the whole and that “pricks” the viewer, piercing, as it were, the fabric of the text (Barthes 27).

The mere possibility that the reflection in the mirror may be accidental (regardless of the intentions) marks a fundamental difference between cinema and other arts such as portrait painting, as the Bazinian logic goes. The slippage of the artist’s self-portrait into the image could never be an accident in the case of painting. “The fact that the human hand intervened,” writes Bazin, “casts a shadow . . . over the image” (12). Film, on the other hand, by discovering the “optical unconscious,” opens up precisely the possibility of intrusion from the outside. Finally, it is crucial to note that this body in the mirror, this *punctum*, is not the only protrusion on the textual surface of *Iracema*. While most approaches to cinema attempt to domesticate the camera’s savage collecting of traces, *Iracema*’s process of production provokes rather than manages that savageness. Thus the film strives to open a space that has its

“proper” textual operations but that at every turn gives occasion for the emergence of the improper—to the point that its textual place becomes textural, crisscrossed by the operations of tactics and tactility.

3 – The Camera, the Threshold, the Encounter

Perhaps I have plunged too soon into a single shot without developing a broader context for the film or the scene. Yet, to allow a fragment to emerge in momentary disregard of context is a temptation I could not resist, as I hope to bring forth precisely the potential unmanageability of the fragment—which is, to paraphrase Benjamin, the splinter of the world burst open by the mechanical operation of camera. At any rate, by zooming into the particularity of the shot, I was not developing an analysis that goes against the grain of the film but approaching what matters most in it.

In this section I will discuss *Iracema* more broadly and show that the camera’s standing at a threshold—literally the case in the vanity scene—is descriptive of the film in general. *Iracema* displays an ambiguous encounter between the staged and constructed (as operations of an authored text) and the recording of the unmanaged bits of tactile everyday life. This engagement at borders and thresholds can also be understood as the interaction between place and its spatialization, structures of the proper and the moment-by-moment emergence of the improper registered on the screen. In many respects, the film’s relationship to the everyday is as complicated as de Certeau’s, involving reflexive gestures that undermine its approach and its appropriation of the improper. Yet, at the same time, by maximizing the possibilities

of the double power of cinema *Iracema* opens a zone of contact, a pluralized space of indeterminations that the written text can strive towards but can never produce.

Filmed primarily with a handheld camera and by a small, mobile crew, much of *Iracema* gives the impression of trying to encounter everyday life unguarded, as it is lived. The vast majority of the participants are local people going about their daily lives—sometimes ignoring the presence of the scene of filming, sometimes intrigued by it. The extensive opening sequence shows a wide range of everyday tasks and experiences. Beginning with a boat motoring its way from the thick foliage of the forest and moving from a small river to a wider one, we witness people cooking, eating, collecting and transporting baskets of fruit, listening to the radio, swimming—that is, with a bare minimum of narrative content, we witness not characters but bodies performing everyday practices before the movie camera. There is an intense sensorial materiality to these shots, resulting from the fact that, without a narrative structure with which to signify individual gestures, they stand out as corporeal practices and performances (“techniques of the body,” to borrow Marcel Mauss’s phrase). Further, effective invocations of the senses are present in elements of each shot and scene. For instance, we see a woman repeatedly hand-pressing red fruits until the juicy pulp squeezes through her fingers. We also see the passengers of the boat in a leisurely swim—an action significantly sensorial as it involves a full immersion of the body in water, complete skin contact. These images draw on our sensorial memory and are not reduced to an observational stance, or to “the fly on the wall” principle of Leacock’s version of direct cinema. What is more important here is not the transparency of

cinema as a view into the world but the invocations of tactility that punctuate the film's entrance into this world—and must bear on our approach to the film.

After several scenes in the boat, the passengers land at the port town of Belém. Unless the viewer is familiar with the film in advance, it is only here that Iracema (played by Edna de Cássia in her first and only cinematic role) begins to stand out as the main character. We lose track of the other passengers but continue to (loosely) accompany her—a continuity that signals her turn from an unidentified body whose gestures are unbound by authorial meanings toward her role as a protagonist in the film's diegesis. The phrase “stand out,” however, is not quite accurate. Iracema plunges into the crowds, mingling with them in a number of scenes, starting at a portside market, and later in a sort of street-fair or carnival at night. My imprecision about the nature of these events is not a result of carelessness but reflects the fact that the film effectively withholds contextual information, leaving us instead groping at fragments of this world, feeling our way in a textural rather than textual display of everyday life. Up to this point we are still, by and large, denied a position of exteriority to a narrative understood as a signifying structure that will permit us to process and interpret events rather than experience them. It is as if we, too, were materially conjured by the film and were walking the streets. These scenes, populated by countless, singular bodies whose movements and gestures are not meant to bear meaning for us, are evocative of what de Certeau described as the tactility of the everyday, or Glissant described as the interweaving of opaque singularities. The people we see are the protagonists of their own undisclosed lives, momentarily inhabiting the space of the film.

There are too many compelling sensual shots to describe here, but their overwhelming tactility can be gleaned from a few examples. A man soaps his body vigorously by the water. We see a woman grab a leafy green from a broth with her fingers and, in close-up, we see the vegetable dangle from her lips before it is slurped into her mouth (Figure 2). Iracema and others are seen handling the merchandise of street vendors—as if seeing with their hands in a sort of affective, sensorial purchase. The camera as a material object is felt as it moves unsteadily through the crowd, its presence sometimes accused by the direct glances of passers-by or blocked by random objects (Figure 3). For a moment a red cloth completely blocks the view, heightening the sense of tactility by denying the penetration of vision. This is an example of what Laura Marks calls a “haptic image”—that is, an image that refuses to grant the viewer depth-perception and that, as a result of this refusal of penetration by vision, emerges as a texture more available to our tactile memory than to visual comprehension (Figure 4). The ever-changing image (a result of the mobility of the camera) is often uncentered, not focused on any single object or person. It is open to the excess of stimuli and of acting bodies, open to the unsignifying sensorial materiality of bodies and objects, open to chance.

Here, moreover, physical proximity is not the effect of a zoom. This is not a penetration of vision divorced from the condition of mutual proximity and vulnerability, divorced from the possibility of mutual contact. Visual mastery gives way to embodied mutuality. At times we feel as if the bodies of strangers brushed against the body holding the camera. The camera’s corporeal plunge into the world mimics Iracema’s own entrance into the crowd (a condition of reciprocity with its

protagonist that the confusion of bodies in the reflection on the mirror seems to, inadvertently, mimic). This reciprocity is not limited to the relationship between the cameraperson and the pedestrians—we, too, are embedded in the crowd. Through a slippage (“a play of strata,” we could say, borrowing de Certeau’s phrase), the scene brings our own sense of corporeality to coincide with the body holding the prosthetic eye of the camera. This slippage is particularly provoked by the similarity of this body’s motility—its bipedal wobble, its brush-wiggle-push negotiation of material obstacles and the crowd—to our own bodily experience. As a result, we are likely to feel as if the skin of strangers has brushed against our own.²⁷ The relevance of this is obvious for my argument, as it speaks to the film’s intense invocation of corporeality grounded in the moment of production. Moreover, it is important because it prevents the possibility that we, as metropolitan viewers, simply lean back and become comfortable voyeurs of this Amazonian crowd. We are not just shown a world but made to collide with it as a result of an intensely corporeal film practice. Rather than voyeurism, the film provokes an unthinking sense of empathy.

²⁷ A recent Brazilian film takes this coincidence of bodies to a new level: for nearly the entire duration of *Viajo por que Preciso, Volto por que te Amo* (2009), the camera sustains the point of view of the narrator, collapsing the protagonist’s body with the body of the cameraperson. The viewer can see the hands of this protagonist but never his face—thus our bodily sensation is aligned with his.



Figure 2 - Slurping spinach



Figure 3 The camera's presence



Figure 4 - A red cloth obstructs the view



Figure 5 - Trinkets at the fair

Such moments during the street scenes bring awareness to the body of the film in the sense that Vivian Sobchack attributes to it: through a symbiotic engagement between operators and mechanical devices, the body of film is a material entity that occupies a volume and, much like the human body, is endowed with organs of perception as well as invested with intentionality.²⁸ Here, however, this intentionality is distracted—much as pedestrians who, bombarded with stimuli, are distracted as they mingle in the streets. Through this distracted intentionality we may reconsider the

²⁸ "As a systemic 'apparatus,' cinematic technology functions to afford the film a material *instrumentality* for its perceptive and expressive *intension*, and to exist invisibly "behind" the film's perceptive and expressive *intention* and to exist visibly "behind" the film's perceptive and expressive activity as the film's ground, as its incarnate and substantial being, as the film's body" (171).

tactility of everyday life and, in the process, reaffirm the fertility of de Certeau's suggestive slippage of tactics and tactility.

As Michael Taussig (drawing from Benjamin) has argued, the distracted body relies on a store of corporeal knowledge, of automatic responses that, much like peripheral vision, guide us in sensuous mingling rather than conscious contemplation. The distracted body has a knowledge that is “imageric and sensate rather than ideational,” he writes. Modernity, with its increase of sensorial stimuli, has augmented the situations of distraction (as Benjamin argues in his reading of Baudelaire, for instance). While not inherently positive, the individual experience of everyday distraction is one of our most widespread, shared commonalities. It is also the site from which we may imagine new forms of solidarity, writes Taussig, in an insight that could very well follow from a reading of de Certeau's text. Yet to approach this shared everyday experience is a daunting challenge. Again reminiscent of de Certeau, Taussig notes that as an “imageric and sensate” experience, the everyday not only eludes “practically all critical practice, across the board, of academic disciplines but is a knowledge that lies as much in the objects and spaces of observation as in the body and mind of the observer” (Taussig 147).²⁹ When it concerns the tactile knowing of the everyday, he adds, the act of “studying” (“innocent in its unwinking ocularity”) comes under suspicion and needs thorough reconsideration.

It is indeed in full sympathy with Taussig's interest in the everyday that I am elaborating here a phenomenological description of the film—phenomenological in the sense that I am putting in abeyance a retrospective approach that analyzes its

²⁹ See his “Tactility and Distraction.”

object in favor of, if I may borrow Clifford Gertz phrase, a “thick description,” here understood as an experiential encounter and acknowledgement of the image as it takes place before the undertow of the narrative gains momentum. This is not an act of self-indulgence on my part (though I confess that I take pleasure in this sensorial description of the world of *Iracema*) but a necessity for my argument. I am emphasizing the “splendor of the insignificant” in countless shots and images that appear even before the movie provides us with knowledge to begin constructing the fictional narrative, before we are equipped to grasp the film’s organizing structure or its ideological and allegorical content. The “insignificance” of a woman slurping a bit of soggy spinach, paradoxically enough, is significant in its non-availability as a legible sign with a decipherable meaning. The image’s resistance to translation into meaning is significant in its refusal of transparency. The bodies and gestures we see are not designed or managed by an authorial structure. They occupy the screen. Eluding an exegetical reading, the presence of this tactile everyday indicates the film’s experiential approach to production and invites our own sensuous handling.

Yet, the film will gradually inform us so that we may take the stance of the proper and think of it not as a plural, tactile space but a signifying fiction, even an allegorically structured narrative. In fact, enacted scenes are interspersed with the spontaneous ones. In a store, we watch as a shopkeeper, with a malicious grin, rips off people who are selling baskets of fruits.³⁰ In another sequence, we see a lumber deal

³⁰ A number of these enacted scenes reproduce events that Bodansky witnessed in the region. Before the making of the film, he spent some time traveling and photographing the region—photos he later used to secure funding for the project with a German television network, which commissioned it as an environmental documentary. Information about this process is available, though not in great detail, in

by the port. In a crowded restaurant, we witness the political maneuvering of a man representing a multinational corporation as he attempts to gain the favor of a local politician. However, these are not at all made of the average material of representational realism. There is a palpable tension in the air as the participants in these scenes are almost without exception local people playing out some actual or possible version of their lives staged in their living and working spaces. At once hyperrealistic and awkwardly contrived, these scenes show the transformation of social actors into film actors as they rehearse an encounter with the apparatus of cinema.

Paulo César Pereio, one of the film's only professional actors—who is known for his over-the-top, boisterous acting style—plays an important role in these scenes. For the Brazilian viewer, his entrance is enough to suggest fiction rather than documentary. As the truck driver Tião Brasil Grande, Pereio interpellates the local population with his improvised and winded paraphrasing of the nationalist discourse of progress and integration. Again, though, we are not in the world of common fiction; the improvised nature of these scenes is clear. In a way, they are coauthored by Tião and his (sometimes disconcerted) interlocutors, who are local people untrained in how to “act.” I will say more about the border that is activated here (the lived and the contrived, the documentary and the fictional) in a moment. For now, I want to note the way that a narrative line progressively asserts itself, even giving retrospective meaning to some (but not to all) of the earlier scenes.

the recently released DVD extras. See, also, Escorel's description in *Adivinhadores de Aguas* and Ismail Xavier's “Iracema: Transcending Cinema Verité” in Burton's *The Social Documentary in Latin America*.

Cumulatively, *Iracema* invites the viewer to coalesce, from the multitude of images, a narrative about a young woman's trajectory from (what we may presume to have been) an uncorrupted life in the forest to her prostitution and decay in the region of the Trans-Amazonian Highway. As mentioned, the opening shots show the trajectory of a boat from a small, wooded river that merges into a larger one to finally lead to a bustling port town—where Iracema will become a prostitute. This transition—from a small river to a large one, from a natural space to a dystopically developed one, from the innocence of a girl who swims fully dressed in the river to the decadence of a roadside prostitute—tells a lapsarian tale.³¹ Her “fall” is precipitated by her encounter with the truck driver Tião Brazil Grande—named after one of the military regime's slogans of national integration. Tião takes Iracema along the newly opened road, where he deals in illegally harvested lumber (illicit transactions we could aptly name “transas”) and after an unromantic affair forces her to stay in a far-flung outpost of the Trans-Amazonian Highway. A series of scenes show her and the territory in ever more exploited and depredated conditions, until the culminating reencounter with Tião at the end of the film—when the truck driver, at first, fails to recognize the diminished Iracema. Summarized as such, the film easily reads as an allegory that works at once for the fictional character, the historical dweller of the region represented by Iracema, and the territory itself. That allegory casts national integration into the “great Brazil” as a depredating invasion, as a massive

³¹ Ismail Xavier, in *Allegories of Underdevelopment*, has read the film in this allegorical key—a reading that I recognize as pertinent but which I will critique for its limited purchase on the film. In a recent dissertation titled *Cinema, Spatial Thought, and the Ends of Modernity* (2008) Greg Cohen echoes Xavier's perspective.

misappropriation that ensues from the sweeping gesture of the “proper” that the project of road-building and national integration represents.

Following the allegorical structure I outlined above, we can make a few more relevant observations—as the structure gives us interpretive traction to process a number of elements in the film. A possible logic of representation ensues, inviting us to see bodies and situations as signifiers of broad sociohistoric elements. The dynamic interaction between the artificial presence of the filmmaking process—represented by Tião’s invasive style of interpellation as well as by the glances at the camera, which accuse its presence—represents the invasion and exploitation of the region in the wake of the Trans-Amazonian Highway construction and the process of national integration. Individual bodies, too, may become representations of intended authorial meanings. Notably, Iracema emerges as legible inscription of the history of the land. Her encounter with Tião “Great Brazil” precipitates her decay. After that encounter, she is incrementally abused and diminished—much like the landscape—until the final scene in which she is a disheveled, unkempt prostitute with a single boot and a missing tooth. This summarizes Ismail Xavier’s insightful—and yet, as we will see, insufficient and problematic—reading of the film. Summarizing, he writes, Iracema “becomes a symbol of the nation and its problems” (Xavier *Allegories* 240).³² In the allegorical key, then, many elements seem to yield to a process of translation, to

³² For a slightly more detailed discussion of the film by Xavier see his essay “Iracema: Transcending *Cinema Verité*” in Julianne Burton’s *The Social Documentary in Latin America*. While Xavier’s convincing argument moves from observations of the film’s principle of mise-en-scene toward an elaboration of the national allegorical critique, mine inverts this route. We end not with the body as a allegorical abstraction, but move from the abstraction to the body.

transactions across a border of meaning that the critic, placed outside and in purview of the text, oversees.

Although this reading is made possible by some significant aspects of the film, one could not cleanly summarize it as an allegory without violating what is perhaps most vital in it. As I have already been showing and will continue to demonstrate, this summary translation of intended meaning—invested as it is in studying texts as authored proper places—misses the plurality of singular presences that the film harbors in its fold. Moreover, the critical procedure of seeing the body as a decipherable sign is to some extent enabled by *Iracema*, but is simultaneously problematized by it. Tião, shortly before dumping Iracema off his truck, places a sticker on his windshield to represent the girl. This is a substitution of body for symbol that takes place as that body completes and exhausts its material use. Should our interpretation in any way reflect this model? Moreover, if the road and its consequences represent the region's appropriation and use by an external intention, should we too make our inroads into the film's text to extract the meaning from bodies and landscape?

4 – Border Negotiations

The film, then, offers two very distinct possibilities of cinematic engagement. The first emerges from the tactility of the everyday—an everyday that is unharnessed by an authored system or structure of signification and that, for that very reason, can be called the “everyday” in the sense in which this chapter employs it. In relation to

the critical literature, I should note that although the film's documentary aspects are always recognized, they have never been appreciated in the terms I am giving them here. The sensuousness of the film and the presence of a multitude of non-signifying fragments and bodily gestures have remained untouched by critical approaches—which, as Taussig suggests, seem constitutively unable to appreciate them. The second possibility of engagement, more digestible to normative critical practices, draws from the apparatus of fiction to construct a story over-determined with signification. Tião and Iracema are not just characters in a linear narrative progression; they are representatives of a national, historical situation. While Tião clearly invokes the national government and the desire to integrate the region not just into the nation, but into capitalism, Iracema represents the fragile landscape and beings that will be trampled and abused in the process.

This fundamental ambiguity between the tactility of the everyday, nudging us towards the experience of a sensorial mutuality and the structural logic of an authored, allegorical argument, is not easy to reconcile. The first, indicative of the openness of the film's physical practice, conjures the viewer's corporeality and folds it into the texture of *Iracema's* world. It casts an empathic spell, the workings of an unthinking solidarity situated close to the skin. The structural aspects, in contrast, may hurl the viewer out of the viewed world toward a position of critical, surveying exteriority. A reading that emphasizes the narrative would tacitly presume the transparency of the text's meaning and locate itself at a knowledgeable, even masterful distance from its object of analysis. Yet, while elements of the film allow, even invite, the recognition of macrostructures such as the recasting of the myth of the "fall," countless other

elements staunchly resist such abstractions. A neat analysis of the narrative structure would have to deal (or hide) with a pile of debris, the outstanding balance of its interpretive transactions.

We may recall here Bordwell's felicitous formulation in *Narration in the Fiction Film* regarding the inherent excess of the visual elements of narrative cinema—that is, elements that, due to what I have been calling the double power of cinema, remain in the image as residue, uninvited and unabsorbed by the narrative. These bits of the world, he writes, “casual lines, colors, expressions, and textures are the ‘fellow travelers’ of the story” (53). In films that attempt to master the material contingencies of mise-en-scene, these bits of debris are like stowaways—or, to invoke de Certeau, illicit dwellers occupying the textual proper place. In *Iracema* the potency of the insignificant (which more often than not floods the image) is such that it would not do it justice to think of its presence as that of fellow travelers. Yet, to completely dismiss the film's narrative would also amount to a partial denial of what it presents and result in an impoverishment of the work. An engagement with the film must in some way deal with the tension generated between the intended and the unintended, the legible and the opaquely sensorial, the text's proper strategies and the traces of the improper operating by an external logic in its interior.

This tension between the fictional-allegorical and the indexical documentary represents a duplicity that is everywhere present and dynamic in the film, cutting through, dividing and reconstituting its space. The dividing line between the enacted scene and the uncontrolled event is sometimes incorporated within a single shot, as a sort of territorial border. In two particularly potent examples, the gritty realism of local

people eating and drinking inside a restaurant is awkwardly rimmed and unsettled by a line of curious bystanders looking in from the street (Figures 6 and 7). Both scenes portray staged, realistic conversations: the first between businessmen negotiating the entrance of a multinational company into the region, the other a casual conversation between Tião and three other men. I say that these are “realistic” in the sense that their main players obey the conventions of representational realism, with its injunction that the presence of the camera and crew be ignored for the sake of creating the impression of a diegesis. The participants in these fictional scenes help to erase the presence of the nonfictional scene of filming—eliding the corporeal presence of what Sobchack would call the body of the film. The pedestrians, on the other hand, gaze at the scene of filming rather than at the scene being filmed and accuse the presence of the otherwise hidden process of production.

The border between organized *mise-en-scene* and spontaneous life comes into view, causing strange indeterminations and exchanges: under a gaze that accuses the production of the film, the hyperrealistic restaurant space is exposed as a sort of fiction, a cinematic construction. Yet, the people who are looking in, acting quite in conflict with conventions of realism, certify to the film’s location at an unmanageable, un-authored world of inhabitants of everyday life that are capable of transforming the text at the moment of production in ways that exceed authorial forethought. Thus, their presence at once undermines and authenticates the film’s closeness to lived experience. In such scenes, we may think of the border that comes into view as that between fiction and nonfiction. The situation of production creates a space of contact between the two, a threshold.



Figure 6



Figure 7

Thinking through this situation in terms of fiction and nonfiction may invoke Michael Chanan's differentiation between the two categories in territorial terms. The difference for Chanan hinges on the film's relationship to its exterior—understood as the lived world beyond the frame, the outside of the film text. While fiction amounts to the founding of a world apart (and is, as such, a space severed from and parallel to the lived world), the documentary indexes a part of the lived world (and, despite the break of the frame, is contiguous with it). The borders of the fictional screen, then, demarcate its rupture from the real, the place where the diegesis cuts itself off from the lived world to invent its own. In the documentary, on the other hand, the edges of the screen do not constitute an impervious border or rupture because the lived world (often by an implied assertion) continues beyond the frame. Reminding us of Benjamin, Chanan notes that we and someone we know can potentially make a surprise appearance in the documentary and, as in the crowd gathered outside the restaurant, illustrate through that appearance the contiguity between film space and

lived space. As is the case with all clear-cut differentiations between documentary and fiction, Chanan's has limited practical applicability. According to his definition, the films of Italian neorealism would be documentaries. Studio-made historical nonfiction films, particularly those involving dramatic reenactments, being temporally cut off from the time to which they refer and unable to deliver indexical images, would be fictions.

Nevertheless, Chanan's recognition of the dual paradigm of film in terms of its relationship to the outside is theoretically rich. Film may either attempt to sever its connection to the outside in the invention of a completely controlled, authored world (which characterizes the vast majority of narrative fiction) or it may attempt to explore a relationship of linkage and continuity with it (which characterizes the vast majority of documentaries). The two options are not only reminiscent of the double power of film; that power is their condition of possibility as well as their statute of limitations. The severed world of the most fantastic fiction still employs the indexical capacity of the camera and thus documents a materiality of being that is in excess of authorial, narrative intentions. Conversely, documentary films cannot escape the fact that they are not a transparent, opened view to the "real" but textual constructs that, as in fiction, rely on many artificial operations and techniques in order to create a final product. I do not state this to make a point about the inaccessible nature of the real or to conclude, as some have done, that documentaries do not exist.³³ Rather, I am

³³ In this point an interesting comparison could be made with the work of Arthur Omar, who, also during the '70s, was pursuing radical experiments with the documentary form. But Omar, employing the notion of the "anti-documentario," attempted to abolish film's referentiality to the external world by showing it as a text, a construction that is invariably fictional and that ultimately refers back to itself and to cinema—to film form, conventions, structures of signification. His project, represented in films

noting that because of the double power of cinema, the documentary image bears not only traces of the material world but the marks of its own textual construction.

Conversely, the fictional image may stand, despite its best efforts, as an inadvertent indexical document of the material world. In *Iracema* this dual potential is brought to the forefront and synergies between the two erupt as the duplicities and borders we are describing.

The manner in which we deal with this contact is one of the critical problems of *Iracema*, as can be gleaned from the critical literature. Although recognized as a groundbreaking film, it is more often the subject of a footnote or a brief laudatory reference than an in-depth analysis. I believe that part of the problem is that its confusion of fiction and nonfiction places it outside or on the margins of the purview of analyses that focus on either category. Filmmaker and critic Eduardo Escorel, in his periodization of Brazilian cinema, points out that *Iracema*, inaugurates a new phase because it “reconciles fiction and documentary.”³⁴ In another text, still keeping his mention of the film brief despite its alleged importance, Escorel rephrases his evaluation by stating that *Iracema* represents the renewal of Brazilian fiction film through its inclusion of documentary procedures—that is, its “reconciliation” of fiction and documentary is an appropriation of the procedures of the latter into the logic of the former (Escorel 102). In a recent book, Fernão Pessoa Ramos formulates a slightly different thesis, which nevertheless subsumes the documentary aspect to the fictional. The fact that the film’s fictional narrative makes use of the unpremeditated

like *Congo* and *Tristes Trópicos*, is in some ways antagonistic to *Iracema*. Also, see Trinh T. Minh-ha’s “The Totalizing Quest for Meaning” in Renov’s collection *Theorizing the Documentary*.

³⁴ For more, see his essay “A direção do olhar” in *O cinema do real*.

events of daily life does not imply a mix (“mestiçagem”) of fiction and documentary genres (Ramos 45).

Variations of this notion are operative in much of Brazilian film criticism and justify the exclusion of the film from works that focus on the documentary form. Jean Claude Bernadet’s *Cineastas e Imagens do Povo* (*Filmmakers and the Images of the People*) and Silvio Da-Rin’s *O Espelho Partido* (*The Broken Mirror*), both influential texts, are interesting examples. Both focus on documentary practice and, in distinct ways, set up problems to which *Iracema* could have been placed in productive dialogue but it is left out, presumably due to its classification as fiction. Bernadet’s insightful close readings of Brazilian documentaries of the 1970s critique the evolving relationship between filmmakers and “the people”—particularly the manner in which “a voz do saber” (the voice of knowledge) operates in the films to transform the people filmed into objects of knowledge for an external audience. In this respect *Iracema*’s complete abandonment of a sociological, knowledgeable posture in favor of tactile, bodily engagement would provide a powerful alternative, potentially marking a new point of departure.³⁵ Similarly, the final chapter of Da-Rin’s book champions the work of Arthur Omar, Jorge Furtado, and Eduardo Coutinho for their complex awareness of the documentary as a textual form—thus the notion of the broken mirror, to suggest the move beyond the notion of documentary film as a reflection of reality. *Iracema* is as complex as the films Da-Rin discusses, anticipates most of them, and would serve as a foil for many of his examples because of its simultaneous awareness

³⁵ Bernadet recognizes the transformation of Brazilian documentary not in *Iracema* but in Eduardo Coutinho’s *Cabra Marcado para Morrer* (1984). As he notes in the introduction, if that film had been released before he finished writing, he would have written an entirely different book. I will turn to Coutinho’s film in the following chapter.

of film as a constructed text and investment in the indexical image (and is in sharp contrast with the deconstructive reflexivity of *Omar*, in which film is conceived as a text that refers only to itself). These omissions of *Iracema* reflect the prevalence of Escorel's and Ramos' notion that *Iracema* is a fiction film that incorporates elements of the documentary—or, as a trivializing article has recently put it, the film is a “poorly behaved fiction.”

Yet, the opposite statement, with the appropriate caveats, could also be sustained. The film, in part financed by a television network in West Germany and valued for its documentation of the devastation of the region (and here the indexical image plays a major role), may derive its primary thrust from its documentary aspect.³⁶ In an interview, Bodansky himself describes his films as documentaries with incorporated elements of fiction (Bruzzo 296), suggesting that his view is the exact opposite from the views of Escorel and Ramos, and from the implied positions of Bernadet and Da-Rin. My contention in relation to the critical literature is that the power of the documentary in *Iracema* has not been properly appreciated. Bodansky and Senna's film, as I said, had a long-delayed release and minimal distribution. But the degree of its experimentation on the threshold of the fictional and the documentary makes it essential for any historical consideration of Brazilian film, whether it emphasizes one of these forms or the other.

Yet precisely because of its duplicity, the film also illustrates the relative ineffectiveness of the terms “fiction” and “documentary.” This is not to say that

³⁶ As Randall Johnson argues in *Brazilian Cinema*, this foreign financing was used by the military regime to prevent the film's distribution for five years. When it sought distribution channels as a Brazilian film it was seen as foreign or vice versa, in a bureaucratic catch-22 that worked as de facto censorship (374).

"fiction" and "documentary" are not useful categories. But in relation to films like *Iracema* it becomes difficult to secure productive definitions for the terms or to firmly locate the film in either of the two territories. What is at stake in *Iracema* is not the subsuming of elements of fiction into nonfiction or vice versa, nor is it a harmonic reconciliation of the two, but the opening up of tensions between authorial control and contingency at the moment of their encounter. The double power of cinema comes to the surface of the film as the encounter between the intended and the accidental, the structure and rupturing event, the legible and the opaque. Thus, the vanity scene, at the threshold of staging and the accidental, remains emblematic.

The film's founding duplicity—which, as a material, territorial border cuts through the restaurant scenes—can also be located on the body of its protagonist, Iracema. This fictional character with potential symbolic meanings is indeed taken across borders for her participation in the film. Edna de Cássia, a local indigenous girl who had never acted or even seen a film, was enlisted for the role and, without a script, encouraged to improvise the scenes. Her fictional trajectory—emerging from the woods in the opening scene to become, as a prostitute, an object circulating for the use of others along the Trans-Amazonian highway—to some extent parallels the manner in which the actress is appropriated and put to use and into circulation by the film. The filmmakers take her from the opacity of her life and appropriate the images of her body to produce meaning. But the fact that the untrained Edna de Cássia comes before the camera with relatively little direction, invited to improvise, suggests that she is not just appropriated by the film but may herself appropriate its space, move through designs of her own with gestures that exceed authorial direction and plan. In

certain scenes she seems to take on Tião's role not just by improvising conversations with local people and being the fictional invader of an unsuspecting lived space but by specifically mimicking—or perhaps mocking—his exhortations of mobility: "I was born to roam the world," she tells a seamstress in one scene.

We must approach the film with awareness of the border between the meaning that either we or the director may assign to Iracema's body and the opacity that inheres in her improvisational use of film space. Our interpretation must waver between producing meaning and recognizing the excess of her corporeal presence—to borrow David McDougall's phrase. By recognizing the remainder left by the transactions of interpretation, we may develop a relationship to her, and to the region and its inhabitants, that is fundamentally different from the one developed by an appropriative discourse of national integration or by the masterful exegesis of the film text.

Suggestively, *Iracema*'s last scene is both the culmination of its fictional narrative and also one of the strongest invitations to a corporeal engagement with the film—speaking to a double gesture of making sense of scenes and of viscerally sensing them. The disheveled Iracema, missing a tooth and wearing a single boot, is seen hanging out with a group of women by a roadside shack. Tião arrives, engages with the women for a few minutes and prepares to leave. Improvised with a group of local prostitutes, the scene has the raw feel of the unmanaged that we have discussed in other moments of the film. In addition to the improvising prostitutes, another man—Tião's companion, we learn—appears in the scene. Interestingly enough, this man is the actual owner of a truck, who had agreed to stop his trip for a few minutes

and shoot the scene. But he was in a hurry to move on.³⁷ Thus, Tião's interaction with him, shouting for him to wait, is not part of a plan or the stuff of fiction but instead speaks to the tenuous assemblage that constitutes each scene, the interaction of independent intentions and contingencies that can be felt throughout the film.

At the end of this scene, the reunited, unromantic couple is laughing and exchanging insults, playing a sort of reverse erotics: there is something intimate in their unreserved language and laughter, but they exchange insults instead of endearments as they prepare to move apart. After Tião enters his truck and shuts the door, the camera angle gives the sensation that we are being hoisted onto the truck, slightly looking down at Iracema. But as the truck begins to move away, we stay put (but somewhat unstable) as the side of the truck passes so near to the camera that it feels like it might scrape against our side. Iracema runs along, smiling and insulting Tião, until the truck picks up speed and leaves her and us behind. She strolls towards the voices of the other women, walking into offscreen space. We are left, not so much as viewers in the comfort of our seats, but on the open road, unsheltered as we watch the dust rising behind the truck. The dust and even the many scratches on the celluloid (which are present in the digitalized version of the film) help to enhance the materiality of the film in a shot already haptic enough to conjure our sense of copresence. In the last shot we are left not viewing and interpreting Iracema but standing near her in the jungle outpost. We may sense Edna de Cássia's presence most intensely now, as she chats somewhere near us, near but unseen. The scene filmed is emptied out, but we sense the acoustic rumblings of bodies occupying the scene of

³⁷ This information can be found in the interviews on the DVD's extra material.

filming.

5 – The Unleashing of Contingency

Let us dwell for a moment on what is most palpable in *Iracema*: the work of contingency. It is through contingency's work that we can best apprehend the film's social critique as well as its subtle intimation of hope. Formed by the combination of *cum* and *tangere* ("with contact") the word "contingency" has an etymological complicity with touch. Yet, usage associates it with the unexpected, the unessential, or "anything . . . that is neither necessary nor impossible," as Niklas Luhmann observes (45). It relates to chance, happenstance, and the accident. In these senses, contingency, contrary to its etymology, is precisely that which is hard to handle, that which slips from our grasp.

Moreover, many observers have noted that, when understood as the accident, contingency has particular relevance in our time. In modernity, "defined by rapid industrialization and the diffusion of new technologies as well as the rapid changes of urban life," contingency "emerges as a site of awe and fear" (Doane *Emergence* 13). With ever greater mobility and speed, the contingent assails the world with the constant threat of change to the point that the most prized quality in contemporaneity becomes the capacity to adapt.³⁸ This is perhaps what makes Paulo Cesar Pereio walk with a swagger. It is not just that the fictional character seems to come out on top in every interaction, but the fact that Pereio is a master of improvisation, seemingly able to wing a conversation with anyone at any time.

³⁸ This has become Zygmunt Bauman's central thesis, worked and reworked in a number of volumes, such as *Globalization* and *Liquid Modernity*.

At any rate, people with traditional life-ways, whose experiential knowledge reaches far back into the past, must encounter modernity as the ever-greater multiplication of unfortunate accidents, of disruptive events beyond their control. Think, for instance, of *Iracema's* choppy trajectory from forest and river to port city, from being picked up by a random truck driver to being dropped at any outpost whatever at his whim. This roadside prostitute seems adrift and exposed to misfortune, as her condition in the last scene attests. Her ending with a single boot whimsically suggests as much. But it is not only in the rapidly changing terrain of the Trans-Amazonian Highway that contingency does its work. Its storm can batter anyone, to the extent that if we can think of the word through the notion of contact at all, it must be in the form of collision. Thus, Benjamin speaks of modernity's "shocks," the assault of the senses resulting from the body's interactions with anonymous crowds and new technologies that ultimately lead to a self-numbing, the sensual retreat of the psyche under attack.³⁹

Paradoxically, modernity unleashes the power of contingency even as it imposes an unprecedented degree of rationalization of all areas of life. Surely born on the border of this contradiction, the rise of statistics represents precisely science's attempt at the administration of the accident, the rational management of the unmanageable.⁴⁰ In his landmark study, Porter writes:

³⁹ As Susan Buck-Morss and Miriam Hansen have argued, Benjamin's hopes for cinema were precisely the establishment of a distinct relationship between the body and technology, which he called "innervation." See for instance Buck-Morss' "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics" and Hansen's "Micky-Maus" chapter in *Cinema and Experience*.

⁴⁰ This is one of Doane's arguments in her book *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, and the Archive*. Photography and cinema also emerge along with the rise of contingency and have particular affinity with it due to their indexical capacity.

Statistical writers persuaded their contemporaries that systems consisting of numerous autonomous individuals can be studied at a higher level than that of the diverse atomic constituents. They taught them that such systems could be presumed to generate large scale order and regularity which would be virtually unaffected by the caprice that seemed to prevail in the actions of individuals (Porter 5, cited in Doane 18).

Statistics recognizes the capricious intractability of singular events but seeks to supersede that power through a system of regularities. In effect, statistics steps away from the aberrance of singularities in order to manage them. It is, therefore, much like other strategies of the proper that rely on an administrative distancing, on a removal from the midst of phenomena, in order to perform their strategic operations.

Iracema's documenting and unleashing of the contingent is best appreciated in relation to the rationalizing discourses that accompanied the construction of the Trans-Amazonian highway. In an official video released in 1970, shortly after a presidential visit to the highway's construction site in the town of Altamira (which, as the reader will recall, is the destination of the troupe in *Bye bye Brazil* that I discussed in the introduction), we find the logic behind the construction of the highway. The narrator, in an authoritative and triumphant tone, speaks of the highway's absolute necessity for the project of "national integration." The highway, he continues, "is an enormous step in the rational occupation of an area characterized by a demographic emptiness comparable only to the polar regions." President Médici, in his Altamira speech, cited at length in the official movie, explains that the goal of the highway is to address the problems of "people without land in the northeast and land without people in the Amazon." The rhetorical neatness of these statements is misleading. The problem in the northeast was not the lack of land as much as the absurdity of a system that allows

a few families to own entire states and keep vast expanses of land unproductive even while peasants starve. In relation to the Amazon, although it is true that the land is demographically sparse in comparison to metropolitan areas, the main problem was and continues to be the inability of the state to recognize not just the rights of, but even the existence of people who already live there.⁴¹ Perhaps more striking than insensitivity to native populations, which still informs official policy in Brasilia, is the glibness with which the project envisioned the massive dislocation of bodies across vast regions.

As illustrated in Médict's statement, this rationality manipulates bodies on an imaginary map, rearranging the national mise-en-scene with a clean directorial sweep and an attitude that stands in sharp contrast with the burning forests, muddy roads rutted by logging trucks, shanty towns, and worn-out roadside prostitutes documented by *Iracema*. The road aids the flow of capital, the rapid extraction of resources, and the uprooting of people in an increased circulation that comes with the multiplication of consequences, and of accidents. Médict's neat vision opens the floodgates of contingency. Indeed, this peripheral region of modernity appears to live up to the

⁴¹ See, for instance, the work of Survival International. The organization is struggling to prove the existence of uncontacted tribes in the Amazon in order to negotiate their land rights. Even the first step of this struggle—that is, the official recognition of these tribes' existence—is hard to accomplish. <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/3340>

As for the tendency to impose developmental projects in the region in total disregard of experience on the ground, it continues to this day. For instance, a recent battle has been unfolding regarding the construction of Usina Belo Monte, a hydroelectric dam first planned in 1975 and now under construction, which will flood the River Xingu right outside the town Altamira. Local populations and indigenous groups are attempting to stop the project, so far without success, due to its perceived social and environmental impact. Remarkably, both *Bye bye Brasil* and *Iracema* situate themselves in an area that was and remains the place of collision between strategic national goals and the experience of those who inhabit the region. Incidentally, the only moment *Iracema* names a specific geographic location is towards the end of the film, when she tries to hitch a ride to Altamira.

bleakest perspectives regarding the advance of capitalism, which Lotringer and Virilio measure by the scale of its accidents: “we have gone from a symbolic local accident—the ‘Titanic’ sinking somewhere in the North Atlantic . . . to a global accident like Chernobyl” (99). *Iracema*’s images of the thousands of acres ablaze and the surrounding desolation, a far cry from the rational development that officially launched the project, illustrate the magnitude of the accident in contemporaneity.

By elaborating on issues of contingency, I am getting at a formulation of the way the film performs a sociopolitical critique through the creation of a filming situation that unleashes the power of contingency. The advance of *Iracema*’s scene of filming into lived space creates the conditions for the multiplication of the unexpected and the accidental, analogous to the way the advance of the strategic policies of the state bring about the outbreak of unmanageable consequences. The pedestrians staring at the camera, the impromptu interactions with strangers, the truck driver shouting to Tião in the last scene—as in these examples, the uncontrolled gathers on the edges and erupts in the film. *Iracema*’s critique relies on the creation of a cinematic situation that mimics conditions of historical experience. The film creates circumstances in which the accidental thrives so that understanding it is accounting for the force of the incomprehensible.

Contingency’s work, however, is not limited to the undesirable accident. Nor is it always a threat to the human body and human agency. Kracauer’s film theory stands in contrast to bleaker views by perceiving the contingent as the harbinger of hope. Arguably the most important concept of his *Theory of Film* (Harbord 90), contingency is referred to and championed in innumerable passages of the text and is submitted as

the defining trait of the medium. In the last section, whose header is the book's subtitle, "The Redemption of Physical Reality," Kracauer states that going to the movies is to experience "a flow of chance events, scattered objects, and nameless shapes." Even narrative films, he notes with delight, are still "a fragmentary moment of reality" lined with a "fringe of indeterminate visible meanings" surrounding the scene (303). These small fringe events are all the more important in *Iracema*, as exemplified by the passers-by lining the scene of filming (303). As Miriam Hansen explains, what is at stake in Kracauer's reliance on the contingent is "the possibility of a 'split-second meaninglessness,' as a place-holder of an otherness that resists unequivocal understanding and total subsumption." He welcomes "the ability of the particular, the detail, the incident, to take on a life of its own, to precipitate processes . . . that may not be entirely controlled by the film" (Hansen "Introduction xxxi). The notion of "the redemption of physical reality" rests not just on that fact that film, indexically sensitive to the material contingencies of the moment of production, is inherently open to the possibility of the accident but also on the way in which the accident is perceived as a storehouse of possibilities.

Insofar as we are speaking of living bodies, the contingent in film is not a threat or disruption of agency but rather the evidence of agency's diffusion. Bodies are sites of indeterminacy that can never be fully managed. For Kracauer, this is manifested in the way that faces can "open up a dimension much wider than that of the plots which they sustain" (Kracauer 303). Contingency is not just the name for the multiplying and imminent disasters that threaten to interrupt individual and collective lives. It names the possibility to signify, feel, or act otherwise and even works against

an intended structural logic. It refers to the immanent power of bodies to repossess the space they occupy, what in de Certeau's terms would be called the tactical inhabitation of proper places. Contingency in film is potentially a trace of the exercise of freedom.

Iracema is bleak in its exposure of the outcomes of the highway's territorial progress, including the advance of the exploitative interests of capital and individuals. But its moment of production is also an invitation, at times a provocation, to the capacity of others to respond to the scene of filming. What the film shows is not quite the world as it is, re-presented with documentary fidelity. Nor is it the structured work of narrative or allegorical representation. *Iracema* shows a world that unfolds in front of the camera, improvised and uncontrolled, largely in response to the presence of the camera, which, like the Althusserian interpellation, invites participants to become subjects. As such, the film is above all an experiential situation exploring the moment of contact between filmmaking and embodied life. Located on the same terrain as *Bye bye Brasil* and exploring rather similar themes, *Iracema* brings to life the silhouettes of bodies and hands pressed against the windshield of the troupe's truck as the indetermination of moment-by-moment contact between bodies and cinema. What in the *Bye bye Brasil* scene is symbolically encoded in the mise-en-scene is here a constitutional trait, the manner in which the production of the film is a corporeal plunge into the world.

Despite frequent laudatory mention of its innovative techniques, the critical literature has missed the central achievement of Bodansky and Senna. It is true that the film inaugurates new possibilities for Brazilian cinema, fiction as well as documentary

(Escorel).⁴² It is also true that, through its narrative elements as well as its documentation of destruction, the film mounts a critique of national integration, unfettered capitalism, and of the strategies and discourse of the military regime. And it is at least to some extent accurate to note, as Xavier does, that the apparatus of film invades lived space in a way that is comparable to the invasion of the territory by outside interests (Xavier). But what is perhaps most crucial and challenging—and what eludes the critical eye, trained as it is to identify the strategic but not the tactical or the tactile—is the manner in which the film invites the presence of an unmanaged world.

Iracema is not exactly a fiction film that contains documentary moments registering the unmanaged everyday world, moments that come along with the fiction as “fellow travelers of the story.” Rather, fragments of fiction are the fellow travelers of a barrage of “casual lines, colors, expressions, and textures” (Bordwell). Considering the force of the unauthored images of the sensual world and the corporeality not just represented but invoked through them, it is necessary to invert Xavier’s claim. *Iracema* is not as much about film’s invasion of everyday space as it is the occasion of the everyday’s invasion and occupation of the space of the film. Doubtlessly playing at multiple borders, it rehearses elements of the cinema of representation while unleashing the diffusion of agency at the moment of filming, the founding requirement of the cinema of experience. The latter’s potential, beyond the unmanaged reactions to the scene of filming, will be developed in the next chapter.

⁴² An inauguration whose power was certainly diminished, as Escorel himself notes, by the film’s limited distribution. It was officially released only in 1980 and its impact was substantially muted by the delay.

Chapter Two

Migrations of Affect:

Synergies between Embodied Experience and the Audiovisual Media

In the previous chapter, I argued that *Iracema* explores tensions between representational structures and contingent events, bringing to our attention the ambiguity of cinema as a medium: on the one hand, its capacity to create stories and encode meanings, as does any authored text, and, on the other, its potential to register events that escape authorial intentions. The film's richness derives not just from the ambiguities between structure and event, but also from the manner in which the scene of filming emerges as a site of pluralized agency, intimating hope even as it portrays the dystopic surroundings of the Trans-Amazonian Highway. However, the aporetic binaries *Iracema* activates are as fertile as they are irresolvable. We can shuttle between accounts of the film as text or as a collection of unmanageable traces, but we can never fully account for both. The contingent, the inassimilable remainder of interpretation, is ultimately outside the film as text, tearing its fabric rather than contributing to its meaning. Yet, as an experiential practice, the film is limited to the unexpected encounter between local people and the scene of filming. It taps into the possibilities of the cinema of experience, but stops there.

This chapter examines the work of Eduardo Coutinho, arguably Brazil's most influential documentarian, whose films also evoke the border of the cinemas of representation and experience. But rather than lingering in liminal terrain, they move decidedly towards experiential practices. As in *Iracema*, Coutinho's films are open to the unplanned at the moment of filming. But instead of exacerbating tensions between representation and experience, they create situations in which representation interacts with the bodies it represents. Through an analysis of three films—the landmark *Cabra Marcado para Morrer* (started in 1964, completed and released in 1984), *Boca de Lixo* (1993), and *Peões* (2004)—I will examine the manner in which his films create gestural and affective synergies between bodies and their images that take place not as belated events in the scene of viewing but at the moment of production. Installing themselves in charged political contexts, his films intervene at the level of corporeal experience, made possible by and taking place at the scene of filming. The three films, although quite different from one another, share a similar tactic: they incorporate the viewing of films and images at the moment of filming. These fertile moments, in which the body experiences encounters with itself as image while simultaneously participating in the production of new images, are emblematic of the arguments of this chapter and will serve as its leitmotif.

As these three films extend over four decades of filmmaking, from the height of *cinema novo* to the present, they provide not just an overview of Coutinho's work but also illustrate some of the transformations undergone by Brazilian film during the period. Each represents a distinct moment of filmmaking, spanning the eras leading from the macro-politics and neorealist aesthetics that prevailed in the 1960s to the

scaled-down cinema of the present.⁴³ These transformations occur not just at the level of style and approach, but also of technology. These films manifest the transformations of the media during the period, from the celluloid print of *Cabra*, to video in the *Boca*, and finally, to the digital technology in *Peões*.

Contrary to diagnoses of the dematerialization of the image as a result of the shift to video and digital technologies, and against the attendant notion of the demise of the indexical image, these films demonstrate the continuity, even the strengthening of an experiential cinema that is invested in the presence of the body. For Coutinho and many contemporary directors, the technological transformations of the audiovisual have not foreclosed the exploration of the physicality of cinema but enhanced it—particularly as it relates to placing living bodies and audiovisual media into a dynamic, symbiotic relationship.

2 – *Cabra marcado para morrer*, 1962-64

Because of its complex history, which spans two turbulent decades and includes false starts and interruptions, as well as significant thematic and stylistic transformations along the way, *Cabra marcado para morrer* is difficult to describe. It was released in the U.S. not as *A Man Marked to Die* but as *Twenty Years Later*, a variation on the title that reflects the temporal gap as well as the changes in the film's intended topic during the two-decade period. Started in 1962, *Cabra* was initially

⁴³ This scaling down of cinema is a phenomenon that will become more evident in the progression of this chapter, but is even more central to Chapter Three, in which I examine films I term “apartment archaeologies.”

planned as a dramatic reenactment of the events leading up to the assassination of João Pedro Teixeira, the leader of a peasant movement for land rights in Northeastern Brazil. But production was interrupted in 1962 by the state police and again in 1964 by the military coup. Nearly twenty years later, when Coutinho returned to the project, the film was no longer about the death of João Pedro, but concerned the life of his widow, Elizabeth Teixeira.⁴⁴

Yet, to say that the final film is “about” Elizabeth is imprecise. The phrase suggests a neat relationship between object and subject, between the film and the topic it presumably handles—a relationship more apt to apply to representational than experiential film practices. Instead, *Cabra* establishes relationships of mutual exchange, exploring continuities and contaminations between the audiovisual and experience, the past and the present, bodies and their cinematic reproduction.

The distinction between representation and experience, as well as the way the film turns a process of reproduction into one of experiential production, is parallel to the transformation of the meaning of “mimesis” espoused by critics such as Michael Taussig, Stephen Shaviro, Laura Marks, and others. While the concept has typically referred to reproduction, copying, and imitation, suggesting, in a Platonic vein, secondary versions of original sources, it has been recast by these critics to refer to a productive power, a force acting in nature as well as on bodies.⁴⁵ This recent recasting

⁴⁴ For a thorough discussion of the film’s history in relation to the context of the peasant movement, or the “ligas camponesas,” see Alcide Freire Ramos’ “A historicidade de *Cabra marcado para Morrer*.” The film also emerges in the context of the CPC, “Centros Populares de Cultura,” which included many filmmakers, including Coutinho. For a history of the CPC, see Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda’s *Impressões de Viagem*.

⁴⁵ For a cautious and insightful history of the concept, see Gabauer and Wulf’s *Mimesis*. As they argue, the term has undergone many revisions throughout its history, a fact sometimes omitted in recent

draws from important antecedents. For Benjamin, the “mimetic faculty” is the body’s capacity to produce similarities, illustrated in the way a child can just as easily play at being a shopkeeper as an inanimate object such as “a windmill and a train” (720). Roger Caillois borrows the anthropological term “sympathetic magic” to speak of mimesis as the widespread power by which “like produces like.”⁴⁶ Echoing these views, Marks claims that *mimeisthai*, from the Greek “imitate,” suggests representation only in the sense that one represents something by acting like it, and, therefore, becoming physically similar to it (138). Understood along these lines, the mimetic relationship between an object and its representation is not one between an original and a copy, to be understood in terms of the latter’s accuracy in relation to an original source. Rather, it involves a play of simultaneous possession and yielding, “a participatory . . . contact between . . . object and subject” (Shaviro 65).

This brief elaboration of mimesis will serve us as we move through the various moments of production of *Cabra*, from its initial stages as a dramatic reenactment of history in the early 1960s to its final stages, during which the symbiotic interaction between Elizabeth’s body and its reproduced image manifest the participatory contact Shaviro and others attribute to mimesis. I will discuss the stages of the film’s production in chronological order, beginning with its initial planning in 1962 and the

appropriations that seem to oppose a monolithic term. Still, the prevailing usage of mimesis follows a representational logic that, in my view, justifies polemical revisions.

⁴⁶ The term “sympathetic magic,” first coined by Frazer in *The Golden Bough* in 1890 and later used by Hubert and Mauss in their *Theory of Magic*, was recently deployed by Michael Taussig. In *Mimesis and Alterity* he defines it as “the power of the copy to influence what it is a copy of” (250). The import of Taussig’s use of the term is first, its relocation from the anthropological domain in “primitive magic” to the logic of colonial and post-colonial culture and experience. Second, the term transforms mimesis into a two-way path of influence, by which the “copy” is affected by an “original,” which in turn is affected by the “copy,” and so on.

partially completed production of 1964. The early history of the making of the film shows the maturing of Coutinho's approach to cinema, which passes from representational to experiential practices. But even in its earliest inception, the film harbors key experiential elements such as a form of sensual, political mimesis that has not been accounted for by the film's critical reception.

Cabra was first conceived in 1962, shortly after the death of João Pedro, when Coutinho met with the peasant's widow, Elizabeth Teixeira, and began planning a film reenactment of the events leading to his assassination. João Pedro's friends, neighbors, and family agreed to play themselves in a film that was going to be staged in the village of Sapé, where the events had taken place. In 1963, when production was about to begin, escalating tensions between peasants and their landlords resulted in the occupation of the village by local police, making filming impossible. The project was then relocated to the village of Galiléia, another politicized peasant community very similar to Sapé. New actors were enlisted from among the local population for all the parts, except for Elizabeth's, who would still play herself. Production then progressed for two months, with nearly forty percent of the film completed when it was interrupted by the military coup of 1964. Soldiers invaded the village with orders to arrest local political organizers as well as the entire film crew. Most of them, including Coutinho and Elizabeth, escaped into the wilderness and avoided arrest. Although all equipment and film-related materials were confiscated, the film footage, which had been sent to Rio for developing, was saved. It would remain hidden for the following 17 years.

The 1964, incomplete version of *Man Marked to Die* occupies a peculiar place

in Brazilian film history. According to film historian Consuelo Lins, the project was legendary in the '60s and '70s for being the only film to have interrupted mid-production by the direct intervention of the army. Yet, contemporary critical opinion seems to agree that if *Man Marked to Die* had been completed according to its initial plan, it would not have been a particularly relevant film. This position is justifiable in an aesthetic sense. From a formal perspective, the 1964 footage is not particularly compelling.⁴⁷ Many shots resemble the gritty black-and-white realism of cinema novo, a movement with which Coutinho was loosely associated. Coutinho's footage, however, lacks the expressiveness of directors such as Glauber Rocha, Ruy Guerra, and Nelson Pereira dos Santos, who were arguably releasing their best work that year.⁴⁸

This qualitative differential can be gleaned from a brief comparison of the opening shot of *Vidas secas* with the shot that was intended to open *Cabra*. Both show the arrival of a traveling family, invoking the migration motif recurrent in *cinema novo*. But while dos Santos' composition makes impressive use of depth of space, Coutinho's displays a stiff, tableau-like style, also noticeable in other shots of the early footage (Figures 1 and 2). Dos Santos' composition suggests a desolation and solitude that, in the film as well as in the Graciliano Ramos novel on which it is based, marks the life of the migrant family in the backlands. The depth of field suggests the distance traveled as well as the passage of time—perhaps a mythic time that brings about a repetition of the same rather than change. Coutinho's shot, by contrast, suffers from an

⁴⁷ For the sake of clarity, note that the final film includes much of the 1964 footage. I will discuss this in more detail below.

⁴⁸ I am referring, of course, to *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (*Black God, White Devil*), *Os fuzis* (*The Guns*), and *Vidas secas* (*Barren Lives*).

amateurish general lack of expression.



Figure 1 - *Vidas secas*



Figure 2 - *Cabra*

However, whatever the possible aesthetic shortcomings of Coutinho's early film, I want to retrieve from his initial project a potent mimetic experiment that is nearly unique in Brazilian film history and has deep affinity with the experiential approach that will characterize the director's mature work.⁴⁹ As it was conceived in 1962, the film represents a politically charged use of mimesis insofar as the participants were not representing the director's premeditated ideas or fictional narrative, but instead reenacting events significant in their personal and collective lives. From the outset, this implies a redistribution of agency from the director to the participants.

To be sure, the use of non-actors was common in cinema novo. But typically these actors were used to represent stories and ideas that were more significant to the filmmakers than to the actors themselves. Here again, a counterpoint with *cinema*

⁴⁹ To my knowledge, the only comparable reenactment is Andrea Tonacci's *Serras da desordem* (2006), in which Carapirú, the survivor of the massacre of a village of Guajá Indians, reenacts, two decades later, his wandering through the Brazilian countryside and his encounters with whites.

novo is telling. Glauber Rocha was keen to use non-actors, particularly peasants. But peasants have a specific representational meaning for him. In the 1964 *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol*, they represent dormant revolutionary potential in need of awakening. As Ivana Bentes observes, Glauber “proposes a pedagogy of violence and revolt in pure state” and “a cinematic utopia of transformation” that is perhaps most intensely represented in the protagonists’ ecstatic run from the arid backlands to the ocean at the end of the film (Bentes 96).⁵⁰ In his 1968 *Terra em transe*, four years after the military coup, Glauber’s optimism dwindles and peasants seem to embody only frustrated revolutionary hopes. In many scenes, the actor Jardel Filho (who plays a leftist artist, in this sense not unlike Glauber himself) attacks the peasants physically, intimidating and assaulting the timid extras as if unleashing his anger at them for failing play their revolutionary roles (Figures 3 and 4). These expectations stand in sharp contrast with Coutinho’s early conception of the film, in which the peasants are not the bearers of historical meaning in the director’s master narrative, but protagonists of an immediate, local history. They don’t represent ideas, as they so often do in Glauber’s allegories, but play—simply enough—themselves.

⁵⁰ The phrase “the pedagogy of violence” echoes Glauber’s 1964 manifesto, “A estética da fome” (“The Aesthetics of Hunger”), where he argues that cinema must incorporate hunger, and that the only proper response to hunger is violence.

**Figure 3****Figure 4**

To be sure, reenactments have a long-standing tradition in the documentary that traces back to the reenactments of Inuit life in Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* in 1928, or of a whale hunt in Pierre Perrault's *For Those who will Follow* in 1963. What Coutinho's film shares with these examples is the investment in collective memory that is invoked and rekindled through the body. That is, these reenactments appeal to mimesis as the store of bodily knowledge used in the construction of continuities and exchanges between the past and the present.

There are, however, substantial distinctions between these examples and Coutinho's film. First, Flaherty's and Perrault's films demonstrate a mourning for traditional ways of life that is vulnerable to accusations of what Renato Rosaldo calls "imperialist nostalgia," which "uses a pose of 'innocent yearning' both to capture the people's imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination" (70). What Rosaldo means, perhaps stating it somewhat heavy-handedly, is that one can mourn the loss of traditional ways of life even while participating in their destruction. The fact that Flaherty went to the region as a prospector representing mining interests would support this charge. The same accusation could not be made against Coutinho's film, in which the reenactment had clearer purchase on the present

than on the past. Particularly in the first plan for *Man Marked to Die*, to be filmed with the real life participants in Sapé, the events that were going to be reenacted were recent, politically contentious, and risked angering the same powers that had ordered João Pedro's murder. The project would be the occasion not only of an act of collective memory, of experience relived through the body, but would also serve as a form of mourning for the assassinated leader and an act of political defiance.

With the relocation of the project to Galiléia, where the film was partially completed, these observations remain valid, but with some modifications. The relocation gives occasion to the establishment of a mimetic relationship between the inhabitants of Galiléia and Sapé. The 1964 film combines the principles of similarity and contact that Michael Taussig claims are always at play in mimesis and sympathetic magic. The choice of the location obeys the principle of similarity, as Galiléia shares many of the characteristics of Sapé. The continuing participation of Elizabeth materially links the reenactment to the original event, as an empowering and authorizing contact. The reenactment of the events in Galiléia remains an act of ritual remembrance performed through the body, as it would have been in its original conception in Sapé. But as this remembrance is transferred from the original bodies to the bodies in a neighboring village, it also becomes an enactment of sensual solidarity connecting one community to another. It is important to remember that many filmmakers at the time believed that film could serve to educate the poor so as to develop in them consciousness of social class. The project of *Man Marked to Die* is not necessarily in conflict with the ideal of aligning cinema and social struggle. But Coutinho rejects any form of paternalism or didacticism towards the film's

participants. The reenactment provokes a sense of solidarity between the villages. By connecting their experiences through mimesis, it establishes a politics that runs close to the skin.

The type of political mimesis I am identifying in Coutinho's early film bears comparison with recent theorization of the term in film studies. Jane Gaines, for instance, aligns a corporeal understanding of mimesis with Linda Williams' notion of "body genres" in order to re-imagine what constitutes a political cinema. Williams' contribution to film studies, as I briefly mentioned in the introduction, was to place the viewer's body at the center of film experience. Body genres, she argued, rely on provoking an almost involuntary reaction in the viewer's body that mimics the sensations the film's images represent: thus melodrama, horror, and porn represent and provoke tears, flinching, and arousal.⁵¹ Although Williams does not use the term mimesis, Gaines is correct to note the similarity between this model and the notion of mimesis as the sympathetic contagion between bodies. From this premise, Gaines reframes the question of the political value of film so that it no longer hinges on the content of the representation or the intentions of the work, but on "the relationship between bodies in two locations"—those in the film and those viewing the film—and the effects that these bodies exert on each other. Rather than provoking political thoughts, she contends that political films should viscerally compel bodies into politically significant action, which she exemplifies as the riot.

But Gaines' definition of political mimesis presents problems. If political films were only those that incited collective outbursts and rioting, the category would be in

⁵¹ For more, see William's essay "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess."

dire need of concrete examples. A narrow definition of what constitutes political action underwrites her project. Further, although her mobilization of Williams' body genres is ingenious, we may not want to limit the mimetic politics of a film to the effect film bodies have on viewing bodies. One of the problems with this limitation is that it reserves the potential of political mimesis for postproduction and would entirely miss the location of politics in experiential films.

In Coutinho's film political mimesis is not limited to the film's effect on viewers' bodies, but inheres in the process of production. The participants are themselves practicing a political mimesis that does not depend on the experience of the viewer to be validated. Their mimetic acts are not the almost-involuntary responses and visceral jolts Gaines envisions. But neither is the reenactment operative on the realm of ideas, as an intellectual exercise. It privileges the sensuous body as the site from which to forge a politics of memory and solidarity that connects bodies in two locations, in Sapé and in Galiléia. Political mimesis in Coutinho is not a deferred event that will take place in the reception of film; the making of the film is itself a political event.

Although Gaines intends to re-imagine mimesis not as a representation of the real but as a sensuous form of bodily knowledge, the model she establishes in some ways emulates the structure of a traditional understanding of mimesis. She is interested in the influence of film bodies over viewing bodies, a unidirectional chain that is reminiscent of the relationship between "original" and "copy." Coutinho's film potentializes sympathetic chains that are more effective in subverting this model. As I noted, the mimetic force of the early film is not exerted over the bodies of viewers but

folds back to the very bodies involved in the project. The original bodies, as it were, act out a representation in a process that ultimately affects and is significant to them. It is difficult, in fact, to think of originals and representations here: Elizabeth, for instance, is the original, the representation, and in all likelihood also the person who is most viscerally affected by the process of reenacting events from her life.

The most uncontroversial evidence of the force of political mimesis in *Man Marked to Die* is not to be sought in the possible reaction of viewers but in the reaction of the military. The reenactment in Galiléia is not just the reproduction of politically meaningful events but became itself a political event. It is not the inert copying of an original but is, in effect, its extension into the present by means of mimesis. This strikes me as a particularly concrete example of what Michael Taussig, discussing mimesis as magic, describes in somewhat esoteric terms: the effigy takes on the power of that which it portrays. In our concrete example, the reenactment takes on the power of the original events, to the point that it jerks the military into a repressive response.

Yet, it is arguable that the first *Man Marked to Die* would not have lived up to the magnitude of the mimetic event to which it gave occasion. The film's mise-en-scene and cinematography not only lack expression but seem schematic. While mimetic contaminations are at the heart of the reenactment, the restricted form of the film seems impervious to contagion, as if it operated according to an understanding of mimesis as realistic representation. Further, from the few completed scenes of the early film we can glean that it was organized as a traditional narrative fiction using contiguity editing. Though based on real events, most of the dialogues were scripted

by Coutinho—a decision that would make the film easier to produce but much less potent as an experiential event. The stifling representational form of the initial project hinders its experiential content.

3 – *Cabra marcado para morrer*, 1981-84

After the interruption of 1964, many of those involved in *Man Marked to Die* had to disappear to avoid imprisonment. Some members of the crew as well as some of Galileia's political leaders were arrested. But most of the people involved managed to escape. Elizabeth Teixeira, who was particularly afraid that her capture could lead to torture or death, distributed her children among relatives, took on a new name, and disappeared without a trace. The film footage itself seemed to suffer misfortunes similar to those undergone by its participants. After barely escaping confiscation, the film was hidden for many years under the bed of one of Coutinho's friends (who happened to be the son of a general). Later, it was stored in a film archive, but it was filed under a decoy name. The accidental similarities between the interrupted film and the interrupted lives of its participants foreshadow the synergies between cinema and experience that became characteristic of the film in its final version.

Far from the scripted logic that organized production in 1964, the 1981 *Cabra* dispenses with plans and follows an open-ended approach: return to Galiléia and Sapé, find the original participants, and learn what had become of their lives. In '81, the film is about the experiential process of its making. Visually, also, the two sets of footage are dramatically distinct. While the scenes filmed in '64 hide all traces of their

production, the footage of '81 exposes the process of filmmaking at every turn. Thus, director, crew, and equipment are often visible in the field of the image—a trait that will be, from then on, characteristic of Coutinho's style (Figures 5 and 6).



Figure 5 - Arrival at Elizabeth's home



Figure 6 – At Elizabeth's backyard

In further contrast with the intentions of the '64 film, the final version combines an eclectic assemblage of styles and registers, including not just the two sets of film footage, but also excerpts from other films, photographs, newspaper images, and even a tape recorder. In this collage-like diversity we can detect the approximation of film form and lived experience. The film, director, and participants share a history of interruption and fragmentation. Thus, the images that appear in the film can be thought of as the debris of history, parts tentatively assembled into a whole that is coherent but heterogeneous. It is as if the film sought meaning not in the synthesis of a single style but in the relations between parts. Similarly, the conversations in '81 are not aligned into a single narrative but are left as fragments of experience, relatable but irreducible to one another. Mimesis, however, guides the film's sensibility as it assembles and seeks relations among parts. *Man Marked to Die* explores similarities

and contagions between past and present, bodies and images, experience and cinema.

Some of the mimetic relationships explored by the film are entirely accidental—but it is not at all by accident that the final version foregrounds these similarities. This foregrounding reveals mimesis as a guiding principle for the film's approach. One example emerges from a conversation with Duda, in whose house many of the 1964 scenes were shot and whose father helped Coutinho, Elizabeth, and others escape arrest when the army invaded Galiléia. Duda tells the story of a book, Curzio Malaparte's *Kaputt*, which was left behind by one of the members of the crew. At the time he felt compelled to pretend that the book was his, and in so doing prevented its confiscation by the army. Later he read parts of it and kept it as a souvenir. Of his own accord, he reads aloud a few lines of the text:

Every morning I sat at the garden beneath an Acacia tree, and worked. If a soldier from the SS came near the garden, the peasant warned me with a cough. When I had to go to the front, I entrusted the manuscript to my friend, the peasant Roman Suchena, who hid it in a cavity in the pigpen wall. I will always be grateful to Suchena for helping me save my manuscript from the hands of the Gestapo.

Concluding his quote, Duda himself notes the similarity between the story of the book and the story of the making of *Cabra*: “This book is like your movie.” Lived history and the story of the film seem not just similar but continuous with one another.

In another accidental similarity underscored by the final film, there is a connection between the last scene shot in '64 and the events that followed. The scene shows João Pedro, Elizabeth, and some of their neighbors sitting in a dimly lit house. She hears a noise and goes to the window. In the next shot, she looks nervous and announces that they are being watched. This scene was filmed the day before the '64

coup and two days before the army invaded Galiléia. In the final film, Coutinho follows it up with conversations about the arrival of the army, emphasizing the strange continuity between the film and history. He also includes a brief montage of shots of his interlocutors in '81 repeating Elizabeth's last words: "Tem gente lá fora" ("There are people out there"). The phrase spreads like a contagion from shot to shot, a chain of micro-reenactments that link film and experience as well as past and present.

But the most interesting use of mimesis in the final film takes the form of an inquiry into the power of images to physically affect the present. The re-encounters of 1981 are accompanied by a re-encounter between bodies and images. Coutinho begins every conversation by handing his interlocutor a photo, or setting up a projection of the footage from the incomplete film. These encounters with images, which are at once the encounter between past and present, serve as points of departure for Coutinho's conversations. At times, images replace questions in the way they begin and stimulate the exchanges. An unstated hope underpins every conversation. This hope relates to the potential of images not just to affect but to restore each person's sense of experience.

This exploration is particularly intense in the case of Elizabeth Teixeira, the widow of João Pedro. By a fortuitous coincidence, Elizabeth's eldest son had located his mother shortly before Coutinho contacted him. After 17 years living with a false identity and in complete isolation from her past, Elizabeth publicly reclaims her name and history through the conversations with Coutinho in the film. This process is punctuated by a dynamic interaction between images and experience taking place on two levels: in the profilmic, where Elizabeth physically engages with images of

herself, and through editing, by which Coutinho elaborates a visual commentary on the relationship between images and experience that unfolds in the profilmic.

The profilmic encounter between body and representation produces the most compelling shots in the film, such as the ones in which Elizabeth looks at images and footage of herself from the 1960s (Figures 7 and 8). If circumstances had caused a fragmentation of her experience, separating her from family, community, and even her proper name and history, the encounter with images now brings with it the opportunity for the recovery of her experience in the present. These encounters with her imaged self take place just as she reclaims a past from which she had become forcibly dissociated.



Figure 7



Figure 8

Just as Elizabeth is reassembling her experience from fragments of the past in the form of images, the film elaborates on the relationship between image and experience through editing. This gives rise to an intercutting of footage and photos of Elizabeth that will gradually suggest that images serve as a reservoir of gestures and retrievable experience. Images and footage from '64 and '81 are placed into a

corporeal dialogue. We see Elizabeth coming to a window in the first film, then coming to a window to greet Coutinho in the second. We see her touching her hair as she stands in Galiléia in 1964, then a similar gesture at her home in 1981. A scene of her speaking at a congressional hearing is followed by a similarly framed image of her speaking to Coutinho.



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

The orientation of her body in each of these shots helps create a dialogue of images, a subtle variation of shot-reverse-shot (Figures 9 to 12). If her body is oriented to the left in one image, it appears oriented to the right in the next. While the editing produces these relations of similarity between the images, in the profilmic Elizabeth is

literally seeing and handling images of herself. Film content and form feed into one another in mimetic synergy.

One of the recurring images of Elizabeth, intercut in these segments of the film, shows her at a political rally in 1963. There, she seems to command the attention of a crowd. The silent footage helps to bring our attention to gesture, to Elizabeth's energetic posture and body language in a moment of political enthusiasm. This particular version of herself is perhaps the one from which she would have become most estranged. Indeed, in the 1981 conversations with Coutinho, she enters the terrain of politics timidly. With some encouragement from her son, she thanks President Figueiredo for the recent political opening. But during the process of the two-day conversation, we witness a body gradually returning to itself. This is most visible at the very last moment of the encounter, when the crew is already in the car, ready to leave. At this moment her gestures regain an assertiveness only seen in the early footage. Her words, too, are no longer of polite acquiescence. As she lists current examples of political injustice, her gestures resemble those she made at the political rally (Figures 13 to 16).



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16

These images suggest Elizabeth's transformation during the process of filming, a result of her reclaiming her name and personal history. It also reveals the film's hopes regarding the power of the audiovisual to rekindle experience. If the malady of 1981 could be phrased as the problem of living in a fragmented present, of having become discontinuous with oneself and one's experience, images can emerge as a store of mimetic knowledge. They are deployed less for their capacity to reproduce the past than for their power to sensually affect and produce the present. In *Cabra*, experiential cinema proceeds from the implicit contention that images harbor forms of experience that the body has lost and that the making of the film is the occasion for their recovery. Representations are enlisted as experiential devices, to which the body

gives and retrieves its affective powers.

4 – *Boca de lixo* and the Return of Stolen Images

Boca de lixo, a medium-length video made in the “Vazadouro de Itaoca,” a waste disposal site on the outskirts of Rio, is distinct from *Cabra* in important ways. Temporal and historical gaps, crucial to the earlier film, do not exist here. Nor did its production involve waiting, planning, or extended periods of filming. Improvised with money left over from another project, the 1993 video is the result of a few days of impromptu taping, completed without interruptions or delay. Another point of distinction: in *Boca*, filmmaker and the people filmed are not bonded by a shared historical experience. In *Cabra*, despite the social, cultural, and economic gaps between the metropolitan filmmaker and the peasants of Sapé and Galiléia, they share an experiential complicity resulting from the interruptions and fragmentations caused by the military regime. This is not so in *Boca* in which, regardless of the physical proximity of the waste site and Rio, which are only 24 miles apart, the chasm dividing filmmaker and the people filmed gapes. Because of this, Coutinho seems more of an outsider in Itaoca than he did in the peasant villages, and the arrival of the filmmaker and his crew is a charged event, perceived as a sort of invasion. In a recent interview, the director recalls that *Boca* began as a “desencontro” (“missed encounter”) that had to be turned into the possibility of an “encontro,” if the film were to exist at all.⁵² In his effort to turn “desencontro” into “encontro,” the director deploys a similar

⁵² Interview given to *Casa do Saber* for the series *Visões do Documentário*, available on YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hneAOHHCSzA>, accessed on 6/4/11.

approach to *Cabra*, in that the participants are less the objects of representation than the subjects of experience, including the embodied experience of viewing and handling audiovisual images of themselves.

Boca begins with a barrage of negative gestures, corporeal refusals that greet the arrival of the filmmaking crew. Men, women, and children turn their backs to the camera, cover their faces, and wave their hands in dismissal. Some even run away, as if they were being targeted by a weapon. Others wrap cloths around their faces, giving them the appearance of fugitives or outlaws (Figures 17-20). As if verbalizing these bodily responses, the first dialogue in the film comes in the form of a challenge by a young teen: “What do you gain by putting this camera in our faces?”⁵³ This pithy question, although directed to Coutinho, could be extended to all ethnographic and journalistic practices—indeed, to all practices that represent those who lack the means of self-representation and do not control the subsequent use and signification of their images. The gestures and the accusative question reveal a well-formed distrust of image-making, which is implicitly understood as a symbolic violence and a form of theft. The question of “what do you gain” by filming implies that someone will profit from their images in a process they perceive as an expropriation, a loss. The reactions, bodily and verbal, amount to a refusal to being captured by the recording device, a refusal to become objects of representation.

⁵³ We should of course not presume that the order of the shots in a film reflects the chronological order in which they were filmed. The editing of *Boca*, however, generally reflects that order, beginning with the initial refusal of the first days and the gradual development of a distinct relationship (*Visões*).



Figure 17 - Waving the camera away



Figure 18 – Masked



Figure 19 - Running from the camera



Figure 20 - The verbal confrontation

Coutinho is fully aware that the film, perceived by the filmed as an invasive and exploitative practice, enters into thorny terrain from the outset. However, he chooses to continue the project and attempts to create a clear relationship between himself and the people filmed as well as between them and audiovisual technology. It is significant that he leaves the antagonistic responses in the final print, exposing rather than hiding the tensions, risks, and conflicts that are the video's conditions of production. These moments could easily have become the secrets of the work, the disposed debris of the editing process. But as in *Cabra*, the conditions under which the film is produced are evinced rather than elided. Also, as in the earlier work, politics is not deferred to the belated effects on an audience but inheres in the process of production—traversed as it is by conflict over what is seen and said, a dispute that is,

for some, the very essence of the political.

Such is the case for Jacques Rancière, whose notion of the “partage du sensible,” a term that refers both to the partaking of the world as well as its partitioning, serves as the ground for understanding the interactive categories of “politics” and “police.” For Rancière, politics is not located in democratic institutions and processes, but in the singularity of events that challenge a given partition of the sensible. Politics, in this sense, is inextricably linked to the present and is defined as a transformation of the “visible and the sayable,” following a “dissensus” that alters the way the world is distributed and apprehended by the senses (*Dissensus* 37). What common sense calls “politics” is, for Rancière, its opposite, the domain of “police,” understood as the overseeing of the partitioning of the sensible (36).

To be sure, Rancière’s model is quite problematic in the way it limits the concept of politics to the event of contestation while reducing all else to indiscriminate, unqualified acts of policing. Such conceptual entrapment is unable to appreciate the incremental political gains that result from moments in which the partition of the sensible is contested and altered.⁵⁴ Rancière’s term “police” is, in my view, in dire need of development and nuance. This limitation aside, his notion of politics is similar to the one that subtends the cinema of experience and is useful for thinking through the kind of politics that is interested in operating in the present, in the here-now of experience. Experiential films practice a politics of aesthetics that can be understood as “‘ways of doing and making’ that intervene in the general distribution

⁵⁴ To illustrate, let’s consider the civil rights movement. In Rancière’s model, the sit-ins that protested segregation were political but the desegregation laws that followed were not. They were part of the police rather than part of politics. Thus, the model’s focus on the “event,” while useful for thinking of the here-now of politics, seems dismissive of the possibility of long-term political gains.

of the sensible of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility” (Rancière *Politics* 13). In other words, this is a politics of aesthetics that hinges on transforming, at the very moment of filming, the way the world is experienced.

A case in point, the dispute that emerges at the beginning of *Boca* is political in the sense that it consists of “an intervention upon the visible and the sayable” (*Dissensus* 37) taking place at the moment of production. The waste site, moreover, illustrates a particular partitioning of the world that condemns an enormous section of land on the edge of a city to become a non-place, out of mind and out of sight for the people who produce the debris that is piled there. Those who draw their livelihood from this non-place seem aware (as we can infer from their response to Coutinho and his crew) that they are granted visibility only in restricted ways—which cast them negatively, when giving them visibility at all. Thus, the conflict and negotiation with the camera in *Boca* is a political event challenging an existing order of the sensible.

Some would argue that the initial rejection of the people working in Itioca should have been sufficient reason to abandon the project. One could invoke, for instance, Doris Sommer’s argument in *Proceed with Caution* where she speaks of texts that refuse the reader’s advances: “The slap of refused intimacy from uncooperative books can slow readers down, detain them at the boundary between contact and conquest, before they press particularist writing to surrender cultural difference for the sake of universal meaning” (ix). She cautions that we respect the inhospitality of “minority” texts, along with their right to reject our intimacy. Along these lines, we may recall Glissant’s “right to opacity,” which is the right of minorities

to refuse to yield to the metropolitan eye.

Although Coutinho does not turn off the camera, I believe that his implicit position is similar. The right to opacity is not just the right to resist knowledge's gaze but to be an active subject rather than a passive object of knowledge. The people of Itaoca's initial reactions reflect the way in which they have been objectified and signified by representational discourses. Thus, when Coutinho attempts to engage with his reluctant interlocutors, their response implies knowledge of the previous circulation of their images. "We are not stealing, we are working," says a teenager, as others chime in. Here the camera is seen as an accusatory device, as if it were naturally inclined to collect evidence of wrongdoing. A woman says she feels "outraged with this, you put things on the paper and people think that we are picking garbage to eat." Later, in a lengthier conversation at her home, she clarifies that she eats some of what she finds but cannot accept being indiscriminately represented as someone who eats garbage. These comments imply previous, stigmatizing characterizations of them as thieves and subhuman scavengers. Proceeding with caution, Coutinho does not stop filming but seeks other ways to film, making the participants subjects rather than objects of the film.

Sommer's insightful phrase opposes a "particularist" refusal of "universal meaning." This formulation parallels the director's avoidance of generalizations. Instead, the film allows the specificity of each person, gesture, and moment to subsist, in what Cláudia Mesquita calls "an elaboration of singularities" (199). This approach stands in sharp contrast with the usual ways the underprivileged are represented. More often than not, images of the poor serve as illustrations for discourses of knowledge,

which, with a variety of intentions, are produced outside the space from which the images originate.⁵⁵ In such cases, the bodies of others, captured in images, serve as the raw resource of knowledge, the matter from which interpretations and generalizations are produced. This arrangement implies a particular distribution of places, power, and knowledge—in other words, a particular partition of the sensible. It also speaks to the people of Itaoca’s fear that their images will be extracted and misused—in a word, stolen.

In the documentary tradition, the distribution of places that locates the source of knowledge outside and at a distance from its object is manifested in the authoritative voiceover narration, “a voz do saber,” as Jean-Claude Bernadet puts it. Significantly, this and most subsequent films by Coutinho have no voiceover. There is no disembodied narrator to signify the images, no exterior place from which to speak with special knowledge.⁵⁶ In fact, the film inverts the direction of the common relationship between the particular and “universal meaning” implied by Sommer’s phrase. The knowledge-producing model moves from specific examples of lived experience to abstractions of meaning, forcing the particular to yield to the general. In this model, the specific is made to secure and substantiate general abstractions. In contrast, Coutinho’s film starts from a spatial generalization—a site—but, from this initial spatial generality, moves towards ever more specific configurations of singular experience, which at no point are instrumentalized in the service of an argument or

⁵⁵ Even the left, Coutinho complains, is prone to portray the poor in such a way as to generate pity and outrage, a practice he rejects (*Visões*).

⁵⁶ In *Cabra* there is a voiceover, which is almost essential considering the historical complexity of the film. Still, reflecting the fragmentation of experience addressed by the film, the narration is split among three voices.

thesis.

A brief montage of images, placed immediately after the gestures of refusal, helps to illustrate this point. The sequence starts with a conversation between Coutinho and a group of kids who are keen to establish that they are not thieves—thus refusing to be generalized into a broad, negative category. The director responds by asking if they know everyone who works at the site. The kids respond with a litany of first names. At this moment in the video, the audio and the visual are momentarily untethered and the kids' voices accompany close-ups of faces. These close-ups have the effect of eliminating the background, bringing forth singularities of feature and expression (Figures 21 and 22). The particular literally—or, rather, visually—replaces the general. The singularities of faces replace the generalities of setting. In the sequence of close-ups the background becomes less visible with each shot, culminating in one shot in which a boy's face not only occupies nearly the entire screen but in which the small bits of background still visible are out of focus (Figure 22).

Further, the use of the kids' voices as voiceover for the close-ups is significant as it suggests the yielding of explanatory and narrative power to those filmed: instead of the director's voice, the voices of the people filmed accompany the images shown. At this point, this is the result of editing, a meta-commentary of the film's form that was elaborated in postproduction. But this commentary alludes to what is performed at the video's moment of production, as we will soon see.

**Figure 21****Figure 22**

Following the same logic of yielding to the specific, the film consists of conversations with a number of people who make a living from the garbage they pick in Itaoca. These conversations extend from the waste site to individual homes, delving deeper into the singularity of each person. This begins during a conversation with Lúcia, which starts in her makeshift shelter at the site and continues in her living room. Other conversations follow the same pattern: a flow from general site to singular, specific experience.⁵⁷ Also, these conversations follow no particular thematic pattern. Thus, the topics of conversation vary widely from work, to family, to whatever personal experience comes to the fore. At one point a woman mentions that she wants to be a country singer. Moments later she performs a ballad in front of the camera, fulfilling, at least for the moment, her wish.

But the most important element mediating the encounter with the people of Itaoca and helping to dissolve the initial tension of the “desencontro” is the use of printed images at the site of filming. Early in the filming process, Coutinho started using stills to begin conversations. Figures 23 and 24, in which people are handed images of themselves and others who work there, illustrates his approach. This

⁵⁷ In the *Visões do Documentário* interview, Coutinho recalls that this first domestic visit was the result of a fortuitous accident: Lúcia saw the crew at the end of the day and asked them for a ride.

unexpected gesture, by sheer force of novelty, serves as an icebreaker to stimulate conversation. But the gesture has further significance. If the anxiety of the people of Itaoca could be diagnosed as the fear of having their images stolen, this move returns the images, as Mesquita puts it, “to their owners” (197).



Figure 23



Figure 24

Whether at the waste site or at the subjects' homes, the interactions often begin with the handing over, and, indeed, the handling of printed photographs. This tactility is not insignificant, given the participant' anxiety over the symbolic meaning that their extracted images obtain. Thus the handling of the prints performs a material, tactile return of images to their owners, reflecting the yielding of discursive power to the participants but also enacting, at a bodily level, a distinct relationship with technologically reproduced images.

Coutinho takes significant steps towards disrupting normal patterns of the circulation of images. The handling of prints, part of this process, makes the people imaged the first receiver of their images. To similar effect, he places a monitor on top of their van and turns the participants into viewers of the film. From these scenes we can infer that this viewing took place in more than one occasion, though these scenes

appear together in the final film. On one of these occasions, the monitor shows, in real time, the crowd gathered before it. Itaoca's workers view themselves viewing themselves, in a reflexive situation that is not a gratuitous mise-en-abyme but a response to the workers' initial reservations about the expropriation of their images; it is an instant and continuous return of the images to the bodies imaged. This use of instant imaging subverts the logic of security cameras, which would serve as a system of vigilance in which the people of Itaoca would almost certainly be the viewed but not the viewers. Here the people imaged are not the objects of suspicion for others but are at once the objects and subjects of their own curiosity. Much like the scenes of viewing in *Cabra*, the camera is directed toward the expressive faces and gestures that register vivid response to the images on the screen. But while the time lapse is crucial to the earlier film (in which the faces are looking not at their current selves but the images of 1964 that were presumed to be lost), here instantaneity is essential: a facial expression is immediately relayed, affecting the expression that was its source, which in turn affects the image, etc. The arrangement creates a feedback loop in which affect travels back and forth without delay. The filming apparatus is the instrument of sympathetic contaminations between bodies and images (Figures 25 and 26). During the other viewing occasion included in this part of the film, the crowd watches sections of the film being made. This is not just an important disclosure that addresses the initial suspicion about the use of the images, but it alters the pattern of social documentaries and reportage by which the people imaged are likely to not see the material at all. Here, they become the film's first audience.

**Figure 25****Figure 26****Figure 27****Figure 28**

Toward the end of the video, shots of the scene of viewing are alternated with several shots of people holding printouts of the filmed material (Figures 27-28). This combination enacts, on a somatic level, the way that people who were afraid that their images would be extracted and negatively signified become the recipients of and commentators on their own images. While in *Cabra* the retrieval of the body's images takes place across a turbulent period of nearly two decades, here the process takes place in a few days. In either case, the films create situations in which bodies and images come into close contact, following the logic of the cinema of experience rather than representation.

5 – *Peões* and the Bodies of Labor History

Peões (2004), the last film this chapter will discuss, is also significantly distinct from the previous two. But the use of images within the film remains of central importance and operates in comparable ways. Its history, moreover, offers points of comparison with *Cabra*, as the film evolves markedly from its initial conception and includes sets of footage divided by a two-decade-long historical gap. The project was initially conceived as a collaboration with João Moreira Salles on the occasion of Brazil's presidential election of 2002. Lula, the founder of Brazil's Worker's Party, running for the fourth time, was poised to achieve a historic electoral victory. João Salles' idea was to document the final weeks of the election by following the activities of the two top contenders, Lula and José Serra.

Although the two directors entertained this plan for some time, in retrospect the idea actually seems an unlikely one. It is difficult to imagine Coutinho making a film about someone like Serra, an established politician who holds a Ph.D in Economics from an Ivy League institution. Indeed, it is even unlikely that he would make a film about Lula at a moment when the union leader who rose from modest beginnings was already a major player in national politics. For all the diversity of the people that participate in Coutinho's documentaries (a group that includes Northeastern peasants and garbage workers as well as people from Copacabana's lower-middle-class), they are similar in that they are not the bearers of institutional authority or the members of cultural, economic, and political elites.⁵⁸ Coutinho's

⁵⁸ A single exception is Coutinho's early film *Teodorico, O imperador do sertão* (1978), in which the protagonist is a northeastern landowner, precisely the type of man the peasants of *Man Marked to Die* were standing up against.

documentaries show no interest in officially authoritative voices, dwelling instead on the experience of people who inhabit the world but are not vested with power to transform it. To borrow de Certeau's terms, he is interested in the world's tacticians rather than its strategists.

Not surprisingly, after a while, Coutinho countered João Salles' offer with an alternative plan. While Salles and his crew would document Lula during the final election weeks, Coutinho's crew would search for workers who had participated with Lula's in the labor strikes of the late 1970s and document *their* experiences rather than those of institutionally empowered figures. With this suggestion Coutinho displaces attention from political leaders to factory workers, the anonymous players who participated in the events that launched Lula's political career in the first place. In this second conceptualization, the film would combine the footage produced by the two crews. A reference to this plan is included in the final cut of the film in a scene in which Coutinho explains this configuration of the project to a group of factory workers. Thus, albeit more subtly than in *Cabra*, this film also includes the story of its making and exposes its production process at the same time that it invites people to share stories of their lives.

Ultimately, the material filmed by Coutinho and João became two separate films, *Peões* and *Entreatos*, released simultaneously in 2004. Both films are indicative of the turn in Brazilian cinema that this dissertation analyzes. João's film is also far from a typical documentary about a political leader. As its title suggests, *Entreatos* presents in-between moments, the times and actions that are usually considered historically insignificant. After filming Lula for several weeks, João uses only footage

taken in elevators, vehicles, and waiting rooms. In *Entreatos* we see Lula in between the moments that would typically be considered meaningful, before and after the rallies and public appearances that are the subjects of journalism. Although in many respects different from Coutinho's film, João's film is similar in the fundamental sense that it marks a shift in attention from that which is officially meaningful and important towards that which usually remains ignored or unseen. For Coutinho, this means a turn to the experience of the anonymous participants of history. For João it is a turn to long takes of meaningless time, performed as if the director believed that the vestiges of something invaluable lay hidden in what is most ordinary. In both cases we see a turn from what could be called "macrologies" to "micrologies," from history and politics writ-large to the scaled-down experiential possibilities located in the here-and-now of filming.

Peões marks this shift, partly, by its inclusion of an assortment of documentary photographs and footage. I mentioned before that the film includes different sets of footage. The earlier footage is not Coutinho's but is taken from three documentaries concerning the strikes of 1979 and 1980: João Batista de Andrade's *Greve (Strike – 1979)*; Renato Tapajós' *Linha de Montagem (Assembly Line – 1982)*; and Leon Hirszman's *O ABC da Greve (The ABC of the Strike)*, released posthumously in 1990⁵⁹. In a manner reminiscent of *Cabra*, the film is interspersed with fragments from these two-decade-old documentaries, visually marking the passage of time and establishing a dialogue between past and present through images. The majority of the

⁵⁹ The film is named for the industrial region of São Paulo, "o ABC paulista." Hirszman shot the footage for the film while completing his famous *Eles não usam black-tie* (1981), a fictional film also about the strikes.

participants of the 2004 film appear in these images. We are, therefore, in the by-now familiar situation in which images are returned to their original bodies.

The distinction between the earlier documentaries about the strike and Coutinho's (and, for that matter, João's) film is remarkable. Although the earlier films compellingly document the resurgence of Brazil's labor movement, which had been crushed by the 1964 coup, their goal is to provide a faithful representation of major historic events—events that exist independently of, and are ultimately outside, their filmmaking processes and procedures. That is, these films operate from a notion of representation that, as I explained earlier in this chapter, presumes that the world is captured and represented by the camera. To be sure, these are not traditional or uninteresting documentaries. With gritty reportage styles and an earnest interest in the working class, the films have some kinship with Coutinho's sensibility. Yet, the use of long and extra-long shots, voiceover narration, and non-diegetic soundtracks are all indicative of the films' investment in providing the representation of macro-events.⁶⁰ The camera at times plunges into the crowd in scenes that are more haptic than visual, more sensual than rhetorical. But then it moves back to positions of overview just as the rhetorical strategies work to represent a major historic moment. The overall effect is one of historical documentation, the representation of events that happened regardless of the act of filming.

⁶⁰ Of the three, *Linha de montagem* is the one that is most reserved rhetorically. The film attempts to let events speak for themselves. Still, this rhetorical transparency is an effect as the film is compellingly organized to narrate the history of the strikes. Despite the lack of voiceover, its use of non-diegetic music provides potent editorial commentary. Thus, following a speech by Lula the film shows crowds of workers to the sound of Milton Nascimento's "O cio da terra," which tells of harvesting and enjoying the fruits of labor, "To grind the wheat . . . and be satiated with bread." The song effectively explains what is at stake in the labor movement.

Without passing a comparative value judgment (which would, I think, be pointless), we can state that Coutinho's approach is fundamentally distinct. *Peões* is interested in the singularity of individual experience without returning singularity to the abstraction of a general, historical overview. Visually reflecting this, the film is composed almost entirely of medium and close shots taken during conversations in enclosed spaces, such as the interlocutors' living rooms and kitchens. The topic of Lula's election, the historical context that led to the making of the film, returns from time to time but is refracted through the personal impressions of the film's participants. In further contrast with the earlier documentaries, Coutinho's approach invests in the imbrications of the processes of filmmaking and experience. *Peões*, like his other films, is not the representation of a world that exists or existed, but the partaking of a present that is affected and transformed by the process of filmmaking. Film and experience are intertwined, mutually productive, complicit.

Part of what the film documents is precisely this intertwining of film and the experience of its participants. In a conversation with Zélia, a janitor for the office of the labor union that led the strikes, we learn that she was instrumental in saving a film from confiscation by the military. After deciding that the strikes were illegal, the military occupied the union building. Expecting to be arrested and to have materials confiscated, the leaders asked Zélia to take a film out of the building. This film was Tapajós' *Linha de montagem*, which, much like the earlier footage of *Cabra*, barely escaped confiscation by the army. Zélia admits her pride in participating in saving this film: "Otherwise we would have no history," she observes. Yet, until the making of *Peões*, she had never seen it.

As in *Cabra*, *Peões* uses documentary images not just through intercutting (that is, a combination of footage through editing that takes place after filming) but in the profilmic event itself. There are pragmatic reasons for showing the earlier footage to the participants. These images are used for their documentary value in a basic sense, as indexes of the physical presence of the workers in the political events associated with the strikes. Coutinho scheduled showings of clips of the films for factory workers with the purpose of recognizing anonymous participants. Thus, some of the scenes of the film show factory workers gathered around a TV set (rather than the projector of *Cabra*) and shouting the names of their friends and acquaintances as they appear among the protesting crowds. Initially, the earlier footage had served to identify participants for the 2004 film (Figures 29 to 32).

From these scenes of identification of anonymous figures (of which the quintessential gesture is pointing) we can infer one of the film's curious relationships with the past, which can be understood as an inversion. The participants respond to images of the strike by identifying strikers. The images serve as evidence of participation accused by pointing fingers and the shouting of names. As we learn from the later interviews, the strikes, which took place on the margins of legality and at one point even suffered the direct intervention of the military regime that arrested Lula and many others, resulted in the persecution of many participants. In the majority of the cases this took the form of a quiet distribution of pink slips to active strikers. The identification of strikers and pointing of fingers in 2001 (when *Peões* was shot) takes place in a very different context and has, in some ways, the opposite effect. If the arrests and firings of the 1980s amounted to erasures, attempts (often successful) to

expel workers from participation and visibility in the industry, the identifications of 2001 amounts to an invitation to participation in the film and, as such, to a return to visibility, albeit in a new historical moment and media.



Figure 29



Figure 30



Figure 31



Figure 32

This “return” is the return of the past to its nameless participants, the return of images to the bodies imaged. The documentary images are not the raw resource from which an external strategic logic formulates general abstractions. As in *Cabra* and *Boca*, here the power to make sense of experience is yielded to those who are and were imaged. *Peões* moves from public events (such as the documented strikes and the viewing scenes that Coutinho organizes) toward intimate ones in which we encounter the identified members of the crowd in their own living spaces. Here again, these

encounters are simultaneously the occasion for the encounter with images, which serve not just as a catalyst for memory and conversation but reanimate, from the image of the past, a sense of experience in the present.



Figure 33



Figure 34

The dual operation by which past and present, image and experience come to interpenetrate one another is suggested in a particularly poignant viewing scene. In this scene, Djalma, a worker who had been very militant during the strikes, is watching a scene from *Linha de montagem* in which Lula speaks to the crowd (Figure 33). Djalma's reflection appears on the dark space in front of Lula, so that he is at once seen in his living room and on the screen. This reflection foreshadows what happens next in the film. In Lula's speech, he invites the younger Djalma to come forward and address the crowd. He enters the frame (Figure 34). The way Djalma's reflection slips into the documentary footage just before his recorded image appears may have been fortuitous, like the reflection of a body on Iracema's mirror, discussed in Chapter One. Nevertheless, this slippage is emblematic of the way in which Coutinho's films seek dynamic exchanges between bodies and images, slippages of

sense and sensation.

6 – Experiential Cinema, Materiality, and the Changing Media

The interactions between bodies and images that this chapter discusses reveal a particular deployment of the materiality of the media that seeks synergies between representation and embodied experience. In some cases, the use of fragments in the form of print images and film footage has structural affinity with the way the films enable the reassembling of fragmented senses of experience. Media specificity, moreover, underwrites Coutinho's projects, sometimes in ways that are not necessarily planned by the director, but that, nevertheless, are aligned with the film's final thrust. Such is the case with the similarity between the fates of the 1964 film stock and of Elizabeth Teixeira—the way they each barely escape confiscation and arrest, go into long periods of hiding, change their names in order to avoid recognition, and, finally, reemerge two decades later. The film can have such a bodily life only because it exists as a material.

At a deeper structural level, the attempt to reconstitute experience after traumatic rupture finds a resonant medium in the celluloid film, which, as Susan Buck-Morss observes, “cuts into reality, dismembers the body, and slashes through every aspect of reality's continuum in the process of constructing the image” (“Cinema” 51). Moving pictures come in 24 fragments per second, a world torn to pieces. But the process is not just one of dismemberment but also one of recovery, as the fragments are reassembled during the viewing experience. Although these acts of tearing apart

and reconstituting are not assimilated at a conscious level they form the material infrastructure of the medium; its subjacent corporeality shows deep affinity with the recovery of experience that a film like *Cabra* performs. Just as fragments of representation find their way back to embodied experience, the discrete frames of celluloid film, like pieces of a world burst apart, are rejoined during the experience of viewing.

As *Peões* and *Boca* use non-analog media, however, these structural resonances, whatever their value, do not apply. Yet, these films also deploy specific capacities of their respective media that contribute to the imbrications of representation and embodied experience that they make possible. The continuing explorations of the experiencing body at the moment of filming, occurring across different media, permit a reflection on the import of the changing technology not only for the material investment of Coutinho's work but, but, to some extent, for cinema in general. Here, in the chapter's final pages, I will seize this opportunity and reflect on the evaluations of the "dematerialization" of the new media and their implications—among them, the supposed end of the indexical image. First, I will outline, in some detail, concerns over this "dematerialization." Then I will show the ways in which these views can be nuanced, in some cases altogether revised, through a consideration of Coutinho's and related works.

If it is understood exclusively as the photochemical imprint of the material world on celluloid, the index indeed seems to disappear in the wake of the digital. The numerical abstractions of the digital apparatus could never invoke the materiality of the footprint or of the death-mask—two of Pierce's and film theory's favorite

indexical metaphors. As Aden Evens asserts, the digital is ultimately a numeric sequence, part of a binary order of zeros and ones into which any type of information can be translated (52).⁶¹ As such, it undermines the idea that the image can bear any trace of an initial contact, the imprint of a material presence.

Dai Vaughan, mourning this loss in her morbidly titled article, “From Today, Cinema is Dead,” explains that what is lost is the reassurance that there is a necessary relationship between images and existing objects. “The visual idiom of the photograph,” she writes, “reassures us not only that it is a non-arbitrary transformation of the thing represented but, more fundamentally, that an object of which this is a representation must have existed in the first place” (182). The print negative, by its very materiality, resists manipulation. In contrast, the bits and bytes of the digital, being a numerical abstraction from the start, offer little resistance. Paul Willeman gets to the heart of the matter by noting that what is changed is the “regime of believability” that surrounds the image. “An image of a person in a room,” he writes, “need no longer mean that the person was in that particular room, or that such a room ever existed, or indeed that such a person ever existed” (20). If the index was the reassurance of a moment of contact, the digital image makes us doubt the link between an image and what it portrays. Ultimately, concludes Willeman, we doubt the existence of the world imaged altogether.⁶² Borrowing Gertrude Stein’s phrase, we

⁶¹ To this effect, see also Soderman’s article “The Index and the Algorithm.”

⁶² It is rather interesting to phrase this change in terms of belief, particularly if we think of the shroud of Turin, which serve as a material link to Jesus (until it was proven otherwise through carbon dating). Religious relics are also reliant on an indexical notion, an initial contact that gives a piece of the cross, or any object belonging to a saint, its lingering power. In this sense, the digital image may alter not just the regime of believability of the image but participate in a broader crisis of faith that finds its uncertainties confirmed in the tractability of the digital image. For more see Didi-Huberman’s “The

might say that, in the wake of the digital, “there is no there there.”

But it is not just a matter of the materiality of space, of the “there-ness” of an existing or not “there.” The notion that the digital image is disconnected from the materiality of the moment of production also entails a change in the image’s perceived temporality. Because the index has a material link to what stood before the camera, the image becomes tethered to a moment in time, displaying what Doane calls an “insistent temporality.” The implication is that the digital, unbound from the “now” of production, has more affinity with the “after,” the “post” of postproduction. With the increased possibilities of altering the image after filming, or even of creating it *ex-nihilo*, the moment of production provides no anchor for the digital. While the force of the indexical rests on that moment, the enhancement of the capabilities of postproduction represents audiovisual media’s dislocation from the “now” of filming to the “after.”

Willemen and Vaughan surmise that this shift entails an increase in the power of manipulation by the filmmaker, which ultimately undermines the democratic potential of the image. They share the notion that photographic technology is democratic insofar as it can serve as indexical evidence for the state of the world, regardless of the preferences of those in power. As an example, we can think of *Iracema* and the way it shows the chaos and devastation of the Trans-Amazonian Highway. Indexical photography, writes Willemen, “has the annoying ability—for authoritarians—to show that situations are often not at all the way governments or other authorities would like to represent them to us” (19). Similarly, Vaughan claims

Index of the Absent Wound” and Doane’s discussion of the relation of the shroud and photography in “The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity.”

that it is not an accident that “the age of the chemical photograph has broadly coincided with that of mass democratic challenges to entrenched power” (192). In contrast, the digital image seems, from this perspective, a natural ally of authoritarianism. Postproduction manipulation grants control over images so that they are not bound to the actual state of the world. Unable to resist, images succumb to the will of power. Over time, they are drained of their credibility to document the world and, as Said’s oft-quoted phrase goes, are unable “to speak truth to power.”

Along with the diminished relevance of the image’s founding material contact, the dematerialization of the medium is completed by the disconcerting nonexistence of any “medium” whatsoever. To this effect, Doane asks: “Where is the film?” (“Indexical” 131) The question points to the fact that in the digital there is no material object that can properly be called “the medium.” While the analog can always be located somewhere, such as the negative, the digital has no palpable presence. It is disembodied, an endlessly reproducible code that suffers no material wear—the kind of wear exemplified, for instance, by the scratches on the celluloid print of *Iracema* or by the body-like adventures of *Cabra*’s footage. In this sense, it has even been suggested that the phrase “digital media” verges on being an oxymoron and that the very idea of media specificity, crucial to early theory, has expired.⁶³

I elaborate on these views at length because I sympathize with the seriousness with which they approach the changing materiality of the media. Moreover, some of these concerns are warranted by the indisputable transformations of our modes of production, storage, and transfer of images—the full effects of which are still to be felt

⁶³ For a provocative take on this, see the first chapter of Janet Harbord’s *The Evolution of Film*, as well as Doane’s article in the special issue of *Differences* dedicated to the index.

and studied in years to come. Yet, there are reasons to question these eulogies of the indexical image as well as reasons to question fears about the supposedly authoritarian consequences associated with the enhancement of postproduction. For example—going against the grain of the idea of dematerialization—new technologies have been a boon to experiential approaches that hinge precisely on the physicality of the moment of production.

First, let's briefly reconsider the indexical, a category that can and should be wrested from its exclusive association with photography. We can accomplish this task by reconsidering the meaning of the term for Pierce and Bazin. For Pierce, the index is not only a sign resulting from physical contact, exemplified by the footprint.⁶⁴ It also refers to the immediacy of deictic parts of language, pronouns such as the demonstrative "this," which "forces the attention to the particular object intended without describing it" (Pierce 181). Deixis, Doane observes while commenting on Pierce, is "the moment when language seems to touch ground, to adhere as closely as it can to the present reality of speech" (134). Deictic pronouns perform an act of referencing characterized by the directness of the reference, as if touching what they indicate, like the indexical fingers touching the prints or pointing to the screen in *Peões*. As a mode of address, the indexical attempts to bring forth the very presence of the person or thing to which it refers. Its directness is a claim to immediacy of a material presence as well as of a present moment in time.

⁶⁴ The indexical is one of the three signs of Pierce's semiology. At other points in this dissertation, I have used the word "sign" in counterpoint to the indexical image because it has the quality of the contingent and the unintended. Although Pierce calls it a sign, he considers it to be hollowed out of meaning: "An index is a sign which would lose the character which makes it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that character if there were no interpretant" (Pierce 239).

Although Bazin discussed the index in photographic terms, it is arguable that the most important element for him was not photochemistry but rather the unprecedented openness of the technological recording device to the contingent, the way in which the camera is receptive to the inscription of physical elements because of the simple fact that they are materially present at the time and place of recording. In the “Ontology” essay, Bazin spoke of this in terms suggestive of manipulation: the photographic image freed representation from the shadow of the artist’s hand. Here it is not the photochemical that is crucial, but the fact that the production of the image is mediated by an apparatus that, although operated by a person, has an indiscriminating capacity to record. Therefore, the apparatus is receptive to the material world in a way that exceeds the control of the filmmaker. In this regard, the transition to video and to digital technologies is not an impediment to the continuity of the index. From the perspective of production, the digital camera has the same indiscriminating capacity to record whatever comes into its view, regardless of the operator’s specific intentions. The possibilities of postproduction do not alter this element of production.

The indexical, understood as the “this-ness” of deictic pronouns, implies a refusal to describe, elaborate, or add meaning. Coutinho’s cinema of experience is moved by a similar refusal, manifested by the absence of voiceover, the open-ended approach to filmmaking, and the refusal to move from the singularities of the moment of filming to generalizations of meaning and argument. The director himself concedes that he avoids all types of generalizations in his dedication to “singular events and people immersed in the contingencies of life” (Coutinho 491). Even in relation to conversation, such an important part of his cinema, his interest is in the smallest units

of experience, in gestures and micro-events that emerge unplanned: “the hesitations, silences, missteps, rhythms, inflections, varied ways of resuming a topic. And gestures, the pursing of the lips and wrinkling of the brow, glances, breaths, the movement of shoulders, etc” (495). I will draw implications from this scaling down, particularly in spatial terms, in the “apartment archaeologies” of next chapter. Here what I am illustrating is the way this attitude is analogous to the deictic. Discursive elaborations as well as postproduction manipulations are anathema to the search for immediacy in the smallest gestures and events. So are they to Coutinho’s work, in which postproduction manipulations are reduced to a bare minimum—to the point that many of his films preserve the order in which the materials were filmed (as is, for the most part, the case with *Boca de lixo*, *Peões* and *Edifício Master*, which I will discuss in the next chapter). This cinematic approach, regardless of the media employed, is highly invested in the indexical.

Although it is true that new technologies have increased the possibilities of postproduction manipulation, they have also enhanced the possibilities of production. Affordable and highly mobile devices have encouraged approaches that are receptive to the material contingencies of the moment of filming. Coutinho admits that, if it weren’t for digital technology’s reduced cost, he could not have returned to feature-length films.⁶⁵ João Salles provides another example. In the 1992 footage for his film *Santiago*, shot with film, the director is intensely controlling of the scene of filming, micromanaging the use of his limited and expensive supply of film stock (more on this in the next chapter). In contrast, when João uses digital technology, the most intense

⁶⁵ A return that took place with *Santo forte* (1999). For more, see Consuelo Lin’s chapter on this film in *O documentário de Eduardo Coutinho*.

characteristic of his work becomes openness to the contingencies of the moment. Patient, unstaged long takes are emblematic of *Futebol, Nelson Freire*, as well as *Entreatos*, and amount to an invitation of the unexpected. The immediacy of the uncontrolled emerges through an approach that could be dubbed deictic due to its refusal to explain, interpret, and elaborate, as well as its purchase on the here-and-now of filming.

Coutinho and João are not the only directors to have capitalized on the new media's opportunities for production rather than postproduction. New technologies have enabled a general upsurge in Brazilian documentaries, beginning, perhaps, with the work of the video-artist cooperative "Olhar Eletrônico" and its landmark works, such as "Do outro lado da sua casa" ("On the Other Side of Your House" 1983), a reportage-style film that mingles with the homeless in São Paulo, to the recent documentary-fiction hybrid *O céu sob os ombros* (*The Sky Above* 2011), which won the top prize at the Brazilian film festival.⁶⁶ Moreover, the growth of documentary and documentary-style fiction is not limited to Brazil but is an international phenomenon that includes the work of directors such as Abbas Kiarostami, Werner Herzog, Apichatpong Weerasthakul, Jia Zhangke, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, and Lisandro Alonso, just to name a few. The entire production of what has been called "el nuevo cine argentino" can be characterized as a return to the indexical, as can be inferred from Gonzalo Aguilar's excellent analysis in *New Worlds* (2008). We will discuss a

⁶⁶ For an overview of documentary production after the 1990s, see Lins' and Mesquita's *Filmar o real*. For analyses of the excellent film by the group "Olhar Eletrônico," see Mesquita's "Alargando as margens," which puts that film in dialogue with Coutinho's "Boca de lixo," and Bentes' "Video e cinema." "Do outro lado da sua casa," which used to be difficult to find, is currently available on youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqvbu-iUoek>.

number of other pertinent Brazilian examples in the next chapter and in the conclusion. All in all, despite the enhancement of postproduction and the supposed dematerialization of the image, cinema seems to be digging deeper into the materiality of the filming moment.

Although we cannot delve into the full implications of the issue, I want to counterpoint Doane's claim that the history of the audiovisual media is characterized by a teleological tendency toward dematerialization. Instead, I believe we are witnessing one of cinema's cyclical turns to the density of physical experience, to everyday life, which, as Coutinho puts it, "is immersed in contingencies." The first of these turns takes place at the beginning of cinema and is made possible by the Lumière brothers' "cinématographe," a nifty device that could film, develop, project, and was highly portable.⁶⁷ The ease with which recent technologies move from recording to viewing (in effect, reducing the "post" of postproduction) is anticipated in this device. With video, the ease of transition from filming to viewing is beautifully illustrated in *Boca*, when the recently filmed material is viewed on the television screen or, even more intensely, when the images being filmed are viewed instantly. At any rate, the Lumière's "actualités," illustrated in "The Workers Leave the Factory" (1895), represents cinema's founding immersion into the material contingencies of everyday life, made possible by the portability of the "cinématographe."

In the 1960s, other technological breakthroughs again take cinema into the streets. Highly portable cameras combined with the synchronized sound of the "Nagra Recorder" give rise to the direct-cinemas of Canada and the U.S., as well as to *cinema*

⁶⁷ In contrast, Edison's much heftier "Kinetograph" sat in his New Jersey filming studio,

verité in France. Particularly influential to the new cinemas of the 1960s, Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronique d'un Été* (1960) used a prototype model of the "Nagra" in a film that is a full-fledged example of what I have been calling the cinema of experience. The tactics of Rouch and Morin's film resonate with those I have been discussing in this chapter.⁶⁸ *Chronique* begins with impromptu conversations with Parisians who are asked the misleadingly simple question: "Are you happy?" Brief interactions give way to extended conversations among participants, strangers who develop relationships and whose opinions evolve during the process of filmmaking. In a manner similar to Coutinho's films, *Chronique* includes a number of scenes of viewing, so that the participants encounter their own images and are even invited to critique the film (in the film) while its production is in progress.

There is a temporal density to *Chronique*, which is at work in the cinema of experience in general: the time of production is not geared toward a future reception but is a sort of extended present, a lived duration in which the participants can undergo experiences and transformations. Although video and digital technologies have not enabled only a single set of possibilities or styles, they have been instrumental to cinema's turn to the materiality of the present with renewed force. Theories about the teleological dematerialization of the media obscure the fact that the audiovisual may be undergoing a period of intense rematerialization, relatable to previous historical turns to everyday, embodied experience. As far as concerns regarding democracy, I should note that the turn to materiality is not inherently democratic—and, in fact no

⁶⁸ Rouch's work is also comparable to *Iracema*. As an aside, in 1983, during a retrospective of Bodansky's work in Paris, Rouch published a laudatory review of the film, recently translated and published by Mateus Araújo in the catalog *Jean Rouch: Retrospectivas e Colóquios no Brasil*, 2009.

technology is inherently democratic, despite the nostalgic assessment of photography by Vaughn.⁶⁹ But insofar as they enable new forms of low-budget, open-ended, and collaborative production, the outcome of these new technologies is certainly not inherently authoritarian.

One of the intriguing claims about the dematerialization of the new media is the supposed disappearance of the media itself. As I mentioned, Doane suggests that the new media has no body, that it is disincarnate. It is true that it has become more difficult to locate the body of a film. However, what is more remarkable is not that it has become body-less but that its possible bodies have multiplied. Images travel across media and platforms with unprecedented ease. Coutinho's *Cabra*, shot in 16mm, most often found in libraries in VHS and occasionally in DVD, is still shown at festivals and retrospectives in 35mm prints. In *Peões*, the documentaries about the 1980 strikes, including the one that was smuggled out of the union building in Zélia's purse, reemerge in VHS and DVD form so that they may reencounter, twenty years later, the bodies imaged there. The printouts of stills in *Boca* offer another instance of images' mobility. An incidental capability of the O-Matic camera Coutinho used at the time, the device allows images to be transferred from magnetic tape to ink-on-paper, a form with undeniable materiality that allows it to be touched and passed from hand to hand. Coutinho's recent works, as well as most of the films I will discuss in the next chapter and in the conclusion, are filmed on digital video, distributed as DVDs and found as

⁶⁹ The same photographic technology used to denounce the Trans-Amazonian Highway project in *Iracema* is used to support government claims in the official short, *A transamazônica*. Similarly, recent imaging technologies can be turned to panopticon-like systems of vigilance, warranting legitimate concerns about authoritarianism. But they can also be used in a diffuse and democratic manner, as when citizens turn their cell-phone cameras towards the police during street protests, putting state power on the receiving end of vigilance, in a complete reversal of the logic of the panopticon.

AVI files and the Web, but are released and stored in 35mm prints.

The abstract code of zeros and ones said to disconnect the image from the material world can perhaps be rethought as digital tinglings prone to migrate across embodied forms. They can even be transubstantiated back to the photochemical materiality of the celluloid film. Understood in these terms, the infrastructural logic of the new media is not at all in contradiction with the synergies between bodies and images explored in *Cabra*, *Boca*, and *Peões*. The new media supports sympathetic exchanges between embodied experiences and audiovisual media and have structural affinity with practices of cinema that are less interested in representation than in enabling migrations of affect at the moment of production.

Chapter Three

Apartment Archaeologies:

Losses and Retrievals in the World of Small Things

As the reader may have noticed, the films I have discussed so far have gradually taken us indoors. From the wide-open, unsheltered worlds of *Bye bye Brazil* and *Iracema*, we moved to the peasant villages and homes in *Cabra marcado para morrer*. João Salles, whose work I briefly discussed in the previous chapter, also seems to perform a move to interior spaces—such as the insides of cars, airplanes, hotel rooms, and elevators in *Entreatos*, his film about Lula. *Nelson Freire*, too, with the exception of the scenes of the pianist performing in large concert halls, has a penchant for enclosures. Some of Coutinho's films include in their own spatial logic a move to the indoors. In *Boca de lixo* we start in the waste site, a space in some ways as desolate as the ravaged lands surrounding the Trans-Amazonian Highway, but we repeatedly find ourselves transported to the domesticity of people's front yards and living rooms. *Peões*, too, includes images of masses of workers filling the streets during the strikes of 1979 and 1980, but the film is mostly situated in small apartments. The images of the strikes are at times seen on television, from the snugness of the living room, making the screen mediate between outside and in,

between the collective event and the individual one.

This move indoors reflects recent Brazilian cinema's tendency to gravitate towards intimate sites and situations. These include first-person narratives of city dwellers (such as Sergio Borges' documentary-fiction hybrid *O céu sobre os ombros*, which won the Festival de Brasília in 2010); personal quests involving the directors and their families (such as Sandra Kogut's attempt at obtaining double citizenship in *Passaporte Húngaro*, Kiko Goiffman's search for his true mother in *33*, and Eryk Rocha's search for memories of his father, Glauber Rocha, in *A rocha que vôle*); films that incorporate family footage (João Salles' *Santiago* and Marina Person's *Person*); and films about life in particular buildings or neighborhoods (Eduardo Coutinho's *Edifício Master*, Cristiana Grumbach's *Morro da Conceição*, and Joana Oliveira's *Morada*). This short list is a small but representative sample of the films whose turn to intimate experience is simultaneously a turn to indoor spaces, most poignantly represented by the small, urban apartment.⁷⁰

Cinema's move to the indoors brings into view an entirely distinct phenomenological world. Instead of vast geographies and open spaces, the topography of apartment films is one of walls, doors, windows, and myriad objects lining the knick-knack shelves and the surfaces of mass-produced furniture. Given the prevalence of the middle- and lower-middle-class apartment, we enter a seemingly non-auratic, serialized world that is nevertheless redeemed by the affective investment

⁷⁰ Though I focus on documentary and fiction-documentary hybrid examples, a similar trajectory can also be traced in fiction films which, since the 1990s, have favored individual perspectives and situations, "even when the issues at stake are social or political" (Xavier "Brazilian" 47). The works of Beto Brant, for instance, deal with a number of issues related to the dwelling, such as the dispute over the appropriateness of the living arrangements of a painter's model in *Crime delicado* and the tense *Invasor*, in which a hitman decides to move in with the man who hired him.

of those who dwell in and use them (more on this later). This move to the indoors also entails a shift in attention from public spaces and collectivities towards the minimal, the personal, and the intimate—a move that may raise concerns about politics. Insofar as this entails the abdication of the public for the private, does it translate into an abandonment of politics? Perhaps the answer would be affirmative, if the political was restricted to practices of understanding, explaining, and directing the fate of collectivities. A more interesting approach, however, would inquire into what kind of politics subtends and operates in the wake of cinema’s phenomenological relocation. It is precisely this inquiry that this chapter will attempt.

The move from sweeping geographies to enclosed, intimate ones represents a change in scale that is corollary to the experiential turn this dissertation examines. As I have already discussed, this turn rejects broad perspectives and history writ-large (which informs much of the revolutionary politics of the 1960s) for the embodied and the localized events experienced at the moment of filming. Coutinho candidly admits his aversion to totalizing perspectives, which he expresses in spatial terms: “[if] the totality is Brazil, I choose Rio; [if] the totality is Rio, I choose a *favela*; not a large but a small one. . . . I reduce as much as possible, abolishing the idea of totality” (cited in Holanda 9). Continuing with Coutinho’s progressive reduction of spatial scale we can see how we arrive at small, personal apartments. João Salles makes a similar comment linking the reducing of scale with the yielding of explanatory authority, the refusal to proclaim an overarching understanding of the world: “I approach Brazil gradually and at the same time I lose something that is wonderful to lose: that over-the-top ambition to explain everything. As I walk I come nearer to my country. Then . . . to my city.

Then . . . to some isolated phenomenon of my city” (Holanda 9). Here we not only find an echo with Coutinho’s claim, but catch a glimpse of the structure of feeling accompanying the shift to small things, intimate spaces, moment-by-moment gestures and experience. This is not just a change in physical location but in the figurative location of the filmmakers as subjects of knowledge. No longer external or above, no longer privileged purveyors of society and its problems, the filmmakers plunge into the lived, phenomenal world.

This plunge into the small and the specific, combined with the filmmakers’ resistance to being the producers of meaning, has the peculiar and paradoxical effect of setting the world loose. Untethered from the gravitational pull of authorial intentions, objects and gestures drift between meaning and insignificance. “Each time, I explain less . . . things become more ambiguous and polysemic,” comments João Salles, pointing to the way in which the director’s yielding of meaning-making control releases the contingent potential of what is filmed. Worlds of meaning (the dweller’s, the filmmaker’s, the viewer’s) whisper to each other but also withhold secrets. Objects, stable though they may seem perched on the shelf, become unmoored and drift in and out of orbits of meaning.

Kracauer signaled this potential unmooring in “Photography,” a haunting essay from 1927. As the photograph of a grandmother gradually loses explanatory context (which in the case of a family photo refers to the continuing existence of the grandmother, of relatives who knew and talk about her, of family stories that aggregate meaning to the image), its component parts gradually lose adherence, becoming a collection of parts and objects: a chignon hair style, an old-fashioned

jacket, and a cinched waist. The grandmother dissolves, becoming instead an “archaeological mannequin which serves to illustrate the costumes of the period” (48). Kracauer’s example has specificities of media and history (being an old photograph) that do not apply to recent Brazilian cinema. But his poignant image still speaks to the way worlds of meaning can come apart—as well as how they can be reconstituted as they pass through the lenses and screens of visual media. Cohesive constellations of treasures lining the walls of someone’s world can come loose, shattering as they come into the view of another. Meaningful things can become debris, shards of a lost totality. Here, there is continuity with *Iracema* and the unleashing of the tension between structure and event that Bodansky and Senna’s film actualizes. Because of the double power of film, the force of the contingent can thrive in the apartment just as it can in the unmanaged street of an Amazonian port town. This is, in fact, one of the goals of this chapter: to show the continuity, even the intensification, of *Iracema*’s exploration of situations of diffused and pluralized agency, to show the basis for a small scale, moment-by-moment cinematic politics that is as rich in potential in the territory of the Highway as it is in the living room.

The apartment, I suggest, is not a surprising locale for a cinema that progressively reduces its spatial scale in order to avoid totalizing perspectives. It is no wonder that these films end up in the apartment, where it is physically difficult to gain the necessary distance for an establishing shot, by which the filmmaker could place things in clear relations with one another and produce, as it were, a totalized view of the scene. But the apartment (and this may be counterintuitive) is also a fantastic site to unleash ambiguities of meaning and diffusions of agency, to unleash the volatility

of the smallest things. Partitions and doors, walls and windows, public hallways and private nooks, serial repetitions of sameness lodging shelters of individual privacy—the apartment is part of an inherently ambiguous structure. The apartment building gives architectural form to multiple acts of refusal and acquiescence, transparency and opacity, exposure and secrecy—all placed at great proximity to each other.

In an essay on film noir, Sobchack approaches the genre through the material specificity of its spaces—such as the roadside café, the boarding house, and the lounge—locating in these phenomenological conditions the crux of the cultural logic of the films. These chronotopes, she argues, redeploying Bakhtin’s term, are spatial premises of the films which, by existing both in the films and in the culture, “materially ground both the internal logic of the films and the external logic of the culture and allow each to be intelligible in terms of the other” (Sobchack 130). Similarly, I understand the apartment not as an incidental background but as a material structure grounding historical and cinematic experience. It is not insignificant that the urbanization of the last decades and the steep growth of the middle-class during the Lula and now the Dilma presidencies make of the apartment a more representative experiential ground than ever before. The point here is not to say that the films comment on or are symptomatic of some easily stated historical truism but to unearth something more crucial and deeply embedded in the films’ spatial sites and situations. Attention to the materiality of the films’ *mise-en-scene* is particularly crucial for the cinema of experience, whose favored relation to historical life is not one of metaphor or representational similitude, but of direct inquiry that tends to enable new conditions of experience through a participatory engagement with the productive process of

cinema.

Moreover, I share Lee Wallace's understanding of the relationship between experience and the apartment in her study of lesbian sexuality: "sexuality and space do not simply knock up against each other in a positive or negative fashion but need to be recognized as mutually constitutive activities whose cross-engagement has a temporal as well as a structural dimension" (Wallace 2). I understand the apartment to be constitutive of experience as well, as it is, in turn, constituted by it through the dweller's practices of inhabiting. Though a temporary event, the presence of the camera is also structurally constitutive of film space, which bears on and interacts with the space of the apartment. In the apartment archaeologies we will discuss, experience is configured through this matrix of conditioning and enabling structures.

This chapter deals with three films: João Salles' *Santiago* (2007), Coutinho's *Edifício Master* (2002), and Cao Guimarães *Rua de mão dupla* (*Two Way Road* 2004). There are several reasons why I single them out for analysis—reasons that go beyond the critical success of the first two films and the outstanding innovations of the lesser-known third film. In them, apartments are not just incidental backgrounds but are essential to what the films explore, exemplifying Pamela Wojcik's argument in *The Apartment Plot*, that there are films in which the apartment site is not just a setting but "motivates or shapes the narrative in some key way" (3). Of course, as these films are not narrative fictions, what counts is not the apartment's importance in the narrative but their centrality for the films' phenomenological texture and experiential events.

It is in this sense that I dub these films apartment archaeologies, wherein archaeology works as a metaphor for the material density of these cinematic inquiries,

for the way they penetrate the architectural and sensible fabric of apartment spaces and perform the filmic equivalent of a site excavation. Our own approach to them is determined by their archaeological practices, which register bits of the world while refusing to completely signify them—thus presenting us with polysemic indexes. In turn, we too, as viewers, excavate shards of experience whose significance will often be indissociable from the imprecision of their meaning.

But these elements in themselves would not determine the importance of these films in this dissertation if it weren't for the centrality of experience that is not just examined, but enhanced and even provoked by the contact with the media apparatus. These excavations are not just archaeologies of experience—which are, nevertheless, fully illustrated in *Santiago*'s nostalgic retrieval of experience from shards of the moment of filming. They also produce situations of experience as archaeology—as in the case of Cao's film, in which complete strangers in possession of movie cameras switch apartments for 24 hours. Sites registering traces of experience become innovative experiential situations. In *Santiago*, the image is full of fossils of experience, of the experience of lost moments which, though irretrievable in their fullness, linger in the present. In Cao's film the participants, digging through a dwelling to find the traces of an absent dweller, become archaeologists of contemporary life. I situate Coutinho's *Edificio Master* between the two, regardless of their chronological order, because it serves as a midpoint between site and situation, between the filmmaker's mourning of what is registered but lost in the first film and the participatory experiential productivity of the last.

2 – *Santiago*: The Pain of Return and the Shard-Image

In a dissertation that champions the turn to the experiential potential of the moment of filming, *Santiago* figures as a conflicted but compelling example. The film is not as much an exploration of the potential of the moment of production as it is a belated mourning over having missed those opportunities. Indeed, the film's prevailing mood and operation is that of the nostalgic return. Started in 1992, the documentary about the eccentric butler of the Moreira Salles home was at first abandoned, only to be taken up again and completed thirteen years later, after Santiago's death. The final film is the result of the director's nostalgic return to the unedited footage, an excavation of ruins that reactivates a trope of photography and film theory by which the image is perceived as a trace of the past. According to the notion of trace, the image is a proof of contact that paradoxically gives continuity to bygone presences while certifying their irreversible passing.⁷¹

Kracauer's "Photography" essay engages with the ambiguity of the photographic image, but emphasizes the latter part of this double capacity, thus linking the indexicality primarily with death. Imagining a scene in which the grandchildren look at a 60-year-old photograph of their grandmother, he writes that they are likely to

⁷¹ This double valence of the image is perhaps the most recurring affective trope of the film image, present in such images as the trace and the death mask, as well as the fossil. See Kaja Silverman's *The Acoustic Mirror* for a discussion, from a psychoanalytic perspective, of examples of this sense of presence and loss in film theory. As she argues, even Bazin concedes that some form of "lack is somehow intrinsic to the cinematic operation" (Silverman 4).

laugh, but that their laughter masks a disquieting shudder: “through the ornamentation of the costume from which the grandmother has disappeared, they glimpse a moment of time past, a time that passes without return” (49). As the grandmother’s photograph careens into decay, its composite parts lose coalescence to become “ornaments,” historical decorations and dissociated parts of a human mannequin. The spatio-temporal and affective integrity of the grandmother’s world is shattered into shards—in view of the fragmentation, perhaps a more apt metaphor than the fossil to point to the specific potentialities of the trace.

João Salles’ film has a similar structure of feeling—but without the lapsarian metaphysical schema that seems to inform some of Kracauer’s writings in the Weimar period (Levin 14). That is, what we may call the shard-image is not on a one-way path to entropy but retains its double value, harboring both the receipt of loss and the possibility of retrieval, however belated and partial. Affectively located in the space between temporalities, João Salles’ film handles the shard-image with a mixture of mourning and hope—and it invites us to do the same. What is retrievable is not the past as such but elements of experience at the moment of filming, which are found in the interactions between the film’s management of Santiago’s body and space (through *mise-en-scene* and framing) and the butler’s gesturing body, which together perform a quiet, moment-by-moment repossession of its space. The apartment, the subtly disputed territory in which these interactions take place, oscillates between being the filmmaker’s set (tractable to his signifying intentions) and Santiago’s actual dwelling.

Nostalgia, operating on multiple levels in the film, is at work from the outset of

the project in 1992. The initial film preemptively mourns the ageing Santiago (who was 80 at the time of shooting), but also the loss of the director's childhood home. João's mother, the last family member who lived in the house, had just moved out, leaving the once-bustling house empty and provoking a sense of loss in the director that arguably leads him to the retired butler, a living link to his lost past. Nostalgia is germane to this discussion of dwellings as it is etymologically linked to the idea of home. *Nostó*, which means "I return," typically refers to homecoming; *alghó* means "I ache" (Seremetakis 4). Nostalgia, then, which is often thought of as a longing, is the ache *for* or *of* a homecoming, the pain of return. It is significant that Santiago's nostalgia, too, enhances the film's multiple aching returns. This is the case not just because he is an Argentine immigrant (who has lived in several countries and speaks Portuguese with a heavy Spanish accent) but also because he longs for a pre-modern historical past. With a fascination for Rome and the nobilities of world history, Santiago seems to belong to a different era. His home is a shelter in which he constructs his own anachronistic world, a place where he safeguards the past from the onslaught of contemporaneity. But the configuration of this home, which for the morbidly inclined João of 1992 is more akin to a tomb, comes under dispute at the moment of filming.

Nostalgia, as the pain of return, can be visualized as an arch that reaches into the past and returns toward the present. In the 2007 film this arch is performed by João's return to the rough 1992 footage and the construction of the final film through that experience. Let's briefly recall the history of the film. In 1992 João spends five days filming interviews with Santiago. He sketches a plan for the film that would

include some images of the empty Moreira Salles home and some studio scenes that would provide visual commentary for Santiago's scenes. At the editing table, the ideas fail to coalesce into a film and João abandons the project.⁷² The final film, narrated in first person (by João's brother, whose deep, seductive voice takes the place of the director's), returns to the material and constructs the new film by probing into the failures of the first—a failure whose possible causes are embedded as indexical clues in the footage. This sets up a tension between an unfinished film and the finished one, between a scene of filming long past and its revisiting in the present, as the film's subtitle suggests: "Reflections on the rough material" (*Reflexões sobre o material bruto*). In this respect, the film has much in common with *Cabra marcado para morrer* and *Peões*, in which old footage is deployed as a reservoir of experience that lingers and comes to affect the present. But here the director is the one who reencounters the images and is affected by them, in an experiential scene of viewing that we do not witness but that nevertheless determines the film.

Illustrating these overarching inflections of nostalgia, the film begins with three shots of three framed photographs of an empty house—which, as we soon find out, is the Moreira Salles home. We see an entryway door in the first shot, then a bedroom with a bare mattress, and finally an empty chair on a deck strewn with dry leaves. The camera moves towards these pictures, its own act of framing complicated by its slow approach to another act of framing. These approximations speak of a

⁷² Note that that the other films by João Salles I have mentioned, as well as the quote by him in the beginning of the chapter, were made after this 1992 footage. Indeed, this project frames the director's career. The initial attempt at making the film takes place before his mature work, and the completed version is his final film. Since the release of *Santiago*, João Salles has been active in promoting culture in Brazil (through the magazine *Revista Piauí*, the Instituto Moreira Salles, and the production company Videofilmes), but has stopped directing.

longing for a place that the double framing makes seem twice removed, impregnated with loss. The narrator makes the following comment: “Thirteen years ago, when I made these images, I thought the film was going to begin this way.” The narrator rhetorically performs nostalgia’s arch into the past, referring to a film that never was as he narrates the film that comes into being while aching with the pain of the return. Nostalgically enough, the finalized film begins in exactly the same way as its incomplete version would have, hosting the belated arrival of the past while acknowledging the incomplete return.

Part of the pain of return that inflects *Santiago* remits to the way film, understood as trace, is invested with an ambiguous temporality, the lingering of the past that testifies to its loss. But in João’s film this ache gains specificity: the rough footage of 1992, the audiovisual index of a moment of filming, bears witness to the botched encounter between João, Santiago, and filmmaking itself, as a practice mediating and giving shape to that encounter. Thus, to return to that footage is to return impotently to a lost scene of filming in which the filmmaker repeatedly refused to yield to his subject and to the experiential potential of the participatory moment. As such, the film is a melancholy endorsement of the turn to moment-by-moment experience—a turn I have described with reference to *Iracema*, examples of Coutinho’s work, and will continue to demonstrate through other films I will discuss in this chapter and in the conclusion. The film’s painful returns speak belatedly of the need to yield to the present.

João’s excavation of the footage recovers a scene of filming in which Santiago’s body is subjected to intense control in the service of the film. The first

mention of Santiago gives a clue to the topic of management. As the camera moves through the spaces of the empty house (the same one seen in the photographs), the narrating voice reconstructs a lost sense of experience. He recalls the liveliness of the house, refurbishing its emptiness with memory. The house had many servants, he recalls, and it was often the site of parties and receptions.⁷³ The narrator recalls that sometimes he and his brothers wore server's outfits and played at waiting on the family guests: "On these occasions the person who placed the tray in my hands and instructed me on how to hold, balance, and not spill was Santiago, the butler of the house." This recollection draws attention, perhaps inadvertently, to what will be subjacent to the 1992 moment of filming and indeed what is always subjacent to the life of a butler: the discipline of corporeal performance. The butler's body must master the strange skill of never being intrusive while always being at hand. Further, his body must at all times perform in a way suitable to the dignity of the house he serves. In João's memory of the boys' game of pretending, roles are momentarily inverted as Santiago instructs the children of the house in the discipline of service.

The fleeting recollection of the serving game, reminding us of the high degree of discipline to which the butler's body, by virtue of his trade, is submitted, is a crucial introduction to the footage in Santiago's apartment. Santiago is not the servant but the master of his small Leblon apartment. His living space, rich in significance, as we will see, is *his* and not another's world. Yet, the 1992 footage registers the intense control of his body by João Salles—in a disturbing continuation of its submission to

⁷³ To put this family in context, I should note that João's father, Walter Moreira Salles (1912-2001), was a banker considered by many as the founder of Brazil's modern financial system. He was also a philanthropist and, before the 1964 coup, an ambassador. Three of his four sons work in the area of culture, including filmmakers Walther and João Salles. Their family house is now a cultural center.

discipline—which is manifested in the way the filmmaker, through framing and mise-en-scene, constructs relationships between Santiago’s body and his living space, as well as in the way he attempts to control the butler’s performative gestures.

The evidences of this management, which would have been elided had the film been completed in 1992, are fully exposed in the final version, a belated yielding which, performed in the absence of Santiago, takes the form of a confession. These are audiovisual bits, traces of the moment of production that were on the outer edges of the main action, as the directorial instructions and comments before and after each shot. Before we see Santiago for the first time, we see a dark screen. The audio is turned on moments before the camera to catch an exchange. Santiago: “With this small testimony, made with all tenderness ... may I begin like this?” João, sounding somewhat distracted from Santiago, gives a short “no” as an answer. Marcia Ramalho, who assisted in the filming, answers that they will begin in the kitchen. These inclusions of the dark screen and the incidentally registered sounds reveal the film’s archaeological impulse, its excavation of the footage and presentation of indexical audiovisual traces. It digs into the debris of the thirteen-year-old images of the abandoned film to discover the moment’s embedded secrets.

There is also a gesture here that is reminiscent of *Boca de lixo*: this exchange, so unflattering to the filmmaker, exposes the conflict over processes of becoming visible and audible erupting at the moment of audiovisual production. As in *Boca*, we witness a dispute over what Rancière calls the “partage du sensible.” The philosopher’s use of “partage,” which suggests both the sectioning into parts and the partaking of the world, helps shed light on what is at stake in these charged moments

of filming. That is, the dispute over what enters into the sensible and with what degree of participation is a dispute over the “partage du sensible.” This dispute at the scene of filming is fundamentally a political one, regardless of whether it takes place in a giant waste-site or in Santiago’s kitchen. The refusal of concession to Santiago, given without a second thought by the young director, recurs multiple times in the 1992 footage and is the bluntest evidence of the director’s failure to yield and collaborate with his subject.

After this aural refusal presented over the black screen, Santiago’s kitchen comes into view. In sharp contrast with the desolate emptiness of the Moreira Salles home, the butler’s apartment is a close-knit space of things, a complex personal object-world. From this shot on, we witness the construction of a particular relationship between the dweller and his dwelling that is established by the austere, at times even oppressive mise-en-scene and framing of the 1992 footage. Just a moment before the film starts rolling, with the screen still black, we hear Marcia Ramalho’s voice asking Santiago to show his kitchen. Then we see him sitting at the end of the tunnel-like room, surrounded by objects. The intentional crowdedness of the composition is illustrated by an open cupboard that gratuitously adds objects to a space already overridden by things (Figures 1 and 2).

There is something gorgeous in this black-and-white composition, which includes the sheen of a doorknob, the many vertical lines adding frames to the camera’s framing, and the pots and pans dangling like metal fruits. One could invoke here Louis Delluc’s and René Clair’s theorization in the 1920s about the way in which ordinary objects can become expressive, even be made wondrous by the power of

cinema (a quality they called “photogénie”). More important than this aestheticization of objects is the body’s placement in the room, a *mise-en-scène* that, I will contend, inverts the relationship between dweller and dwelling, between Santiago and his world of objects. Instead of this being Santiago’s inhabited space and object-world, it is as if his body belonged to the objects. His body is tightly wedged in the midst of things, contained by added lines of framing and nearly buried in the clutter. In relation to the body the objects become nearly menacing, teetering above and around. As if he had been pushed deep into the space, the objects take precedence over the film’s ostensible subject, to the point that the doorknob is larger than his head, the typewriter as large as his entire body. Our eyes have to dig through layers of things before reaching the buried protagonist. Furthermore, the situation is reminiscent of the way a butler might offer items on a tray, his serving body disappearing discreetly behind the objects served.



Figure 1



Figure 2

One could infer other meanings from Santiago’s placement in this precarious universe of things. On a brighter note, it can suggest the fragility of this eighty-year-old man. That is, tenderness and concern, and a preemptive kind of mourning for the

aging butler, could underwrite the composition. Still another possible inference is that Santiago's placement may be seen as a form of retreat from the filmmaker. The things standing between him and the apparatus may constitute shields and walls—an improvised refuge in the invaded domestic space. His apartment *is* a sort of shelter, as we will see below. Yet, although these alternate inferences may hold some traces of credibility, the audio conversation preceding the visual forces us to nuance them. The lack of concessions offered to Santiago reveals that at that moment of filming the preoccupation was not with him but with the realization of the film according to a preconceived aesthetic vision. Also, Santiago's request to begin with a dedication illustrates his desire to come forth, to make himself visible and audible in ways of his own choosing. We will see further evidence that he seeks to assert himself in the film, to come forward rather than to retreat.

Two of the most interesting objects standing between the camera and Santiago, the eyeglasses and the old Remington typewriter, are caught in the implications of framing and mise-en-scene. The glasses, their framed lenses evocative of filmic visuality, stand between filmmaker and the person filmed—though closer to the former who, as we see, refuses to yield control over the process. It is precisely this issue of control that imbues the typewriter with interest. It invokes problems of authority and authorship vital to the scene of filming (and vital to the type of attention this dissertation brings to cinema). The shot's composition seems oddly overwritten, overstated in its reframing of the relationship between Santiago and his living space. Though here, in a world of things, "overwritten" does not imply an excess of adjectives but of nouns, a surplus of objects excessive to the point of suggesting a

threat to the physical integrity of the retired butler.

Enforcing the subjacent issue of authorship and authority, the film's subsequent shots show the director's typewritten plans for the original film and the only completed sequence of the 1992 project. The sequence is a montage that uses parts of the kitchen scene but intercuts them with a series of shots taken in the studio. We see a boxer, a vase of flowers, an electric train traveling through a cloud of smoke. Santiago's voice on the soundtrack threads these assorted images—images that intend to reflect elements of his narrative. But the sequence gives an even stronger impression of being overburdened with authorial input.

Admirers of João's work are likely to be surprised by the terseness of the film's composition and the rhetorical excess of its only completed montage sequence. As I mentioned in the previous chapter in relation to *Entreatos* (2004), his films tend to have the opposite quality: a rhetorical restraint manifested in long takes and real time. His films seek a patient proximity to the spontaneous and the ordinary, operating as if the surface of the ordinary present withheld the most valuable secrets. His work seems inspired by the notion that meaning dwells in what is seemingly insignificant, such as the pauses and silences in a conversation, or the purposeless gaps between intentional actions and events. Even in his three episodes of the TV series "Futebol" (1998), João places emphasis on the duration of the unmanaged moment of filming. In the third episode, about Paulo Cesar Lima, a forgotten soccer hero from the 1970s, many of the scenes document the periods of waiting for the player's arrival in front of his building. The doorman, the curb, and the intercom—these have so much screen time that they become protagonists. Perhaps the most notable characteristic of his

work is patience with the moment of filming, openness to the fortuitous, and a yielding to the plural agency of the present, precisely the qualities that the 1992 footage seems to lack. This difference, in part, relates to specificity of media. The films of waiting are shot digitally and seem unconcerned with economizing film material. *Santiago*, shot in celluloid, is anxiously managed. To be sure, this is merely a contributing factor, not the final explanation for, the shortcomings of 1992.

The stern composition of nearly every shot can be sensed as the film's strategy for disciplining Santiago's body. It is also as if Santiago's dwelling has been placed under siege. In a scene in which this is particularly acute, he sits on a stool next to an armchair (Figures 3 and 4). The comfort of the empty chair contrasts with his placement on the stool. He is again framed by vertical lines, contained by additional frames within the film's framing. In this scene, which the narrator explains was the last scene shot in 1992, the retired butler raises his head slowly and recites a prayer in Latin. João includes the audio interactions between the narrator and Santiago—thus folding into the final film all of the material that would have been edited out, never to be retrieved again. He asks Santiago to repeat the scene several times: "Santiago, lower your head one more time," he insists. A black screen follows this scene but the audio continues to record. Santiago again makes a request: "Joãozinho . . . can I add a sonnet, it's short . . . 'Because I belong to a group of damned beings...' " The answer again is "no." The 1992 João, stunningly insensitive to the moment, worries that they are almost out of film stock.

**Figure 3****Figure 4**

With the sensibility that João brings to bear on the footage for the final film, the parts that were least significant become most crucial. The narrator cites Herzog, who claims that often what is best in a shot takes place fortuitously before or after the action. These are the unflattering bits presented in a film that perform a simultaneous eulogy to Santiago and a confession of guilt. During the days of filming, the narrator confides in candid self-critique, “Santiago remained the butler and I the child of the house.” While João’s assessment is sound, we can further excavate the film to retrieve more than the insensitivities of a young director as he disciplines Santiago’s body and lays claim to his space.

The 1992 footage retains traces of what amounts to a quiet insurrection of gestures suggesting that although João missed the opportunity to yield to the moment of filming, Santiago may have surreptitiously asserted himself. Throughout the film we can locate this insurrection in the autonomy and expressivity of Santiago’s hands and the affective relationship he establishes with objects and space, in counterpoint to the impositions of the scene of filming. Sometimes this is very subtle, as when he is placed in the corner of his bedroom next to the shelf where he keeps his writings. His hand repeatedly caresses the edges of his papers. This touch establishes an entirely

different affective relationship with the object-world surrounding him: he is no longer trapped and buried in the arrangement of things, as he was in the kitchen, but is sensuously possessing things, reclaiming them as part of his world rather than as building blocks of the director's composition.

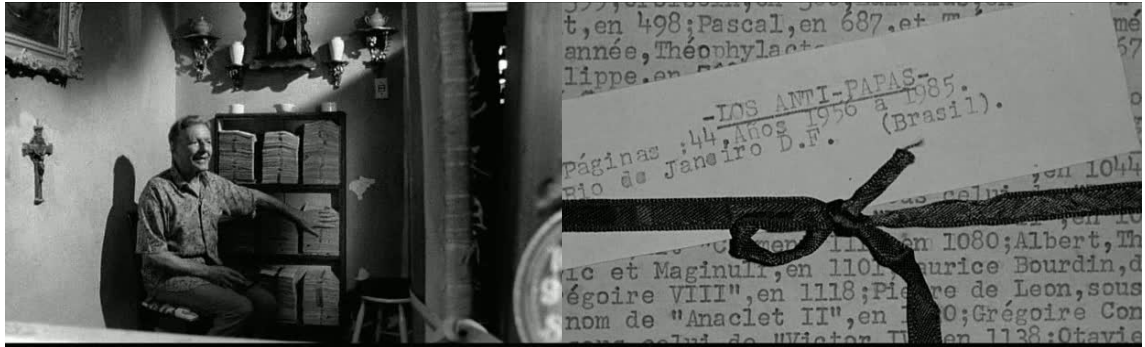


Figure 5

Figure 6

It is relevant that the objects he is touching in Figure 6 are the pages of his own writings, recalling the typewriter in the kitchen and the issues of authorship and authority it invokes. Santiago was an amateur scholar who dedicated his life to writing, by his own definition, a universal history of the aristocracy starting with the Sumerian Dynasty of Ur. "Aristocracy" here is a peculiar term, as his notes include mentions of Dakota chiefs, professional wrestlers, and movie stars (of which Fred Astaire was his favorite). He read and wrote in five languages. The 30,000 pages of Santiago's writing are largely made up of copied fragments from assorted texts interspersed with personal notes and opinions. When he deemed the history of a particular dynasty complete (which in some cases took nearly five decades of work), he would organize the text in chronological order and fasten it with a ribbon (Figure 6).

I elaborate on this description in part because it is irresistible to describe the eccentricity of this studious butler, but more importantly because in this peculiar form of scholarship we can catch a glimpse of Santiago's relationship to the world. His writing does not aim to make an argument as much as it hopes to safeguard from oblivion and, in a sense, to host those who lived before. I say this because Santiago speaks as if the universal aristocracy dwelled in his pages. On the weekends, he explains, while caressing the edges of the papers, he unbundles the pages to allow them (the aristocrats, dwellers of his pages) to breathe and receive sunlight. He walks them around his apartment, talks to them. Meanwhile, as he explains this routine of cohabitation, the old pendulum clock above the shelf rings the hour and Santiago explains that the tolling of the bells ("las campanadas") keep them alive. It is as if the clock on the wall is the bell tower keeping time for the "universal aristocracy."

This safekeeping of the universal aristocracy is a manifestation of Santiago's nostalgia. João, mired in his own nostalgia, perceives Santiago's morbidly. Thus the film's *mise-en-scene*, which buries the butler's body deep in space and in a clutter of things. Physically distanced, Santiago's body is also contained by the vertical lines that seem to place his framed image within other frames, removing it further, echoing the pictures of the uninhabited house in the beginning of the film. The apartment's architecture and *décor* are used by the film to suggest the body's imminent disappearance, as if space was closing in upon it (see for instance the narrowed visible space in Figures 3 and 4 and the contrite, lifeless body language). Santiago's world seems to João a museum—or, worse, a kind of mausoleum. At one point he asks plainly: "Is this apartment a tomb to you?" Santiago agreeably says yes, but suggests

that it is a living tomb. What João's approach misses is the way Santiago's apartment is not a dead but a living world.

In fact, the 1992 footage harbors a silent story about a body reclaiming autonomy over its space during a scene of filming. This can be noticed particularly in relation to his hands, such as in their subtle caress of the pages seen in Figure 5. Figures 7 and 8 illustrate the expressiveness of Santiago's gestures. In each scene, regardless of the sternness of the composition and the impositions of the director, Santiago reaffirms the liveliness of his world through gesture. In the scene represented in Figure 8 Santiago is again awkwardly placed. He stands in a room, wedged between objects and nearly obstructed by curtains. The narrator concedes that he no longer remembers why he had made Santiago stand where he stood. Yet, as the butler describes the flower arrangements he used to make for the events at the Moreira Salles home, his body seems to come alive in a mimetic emulation of the process. Describing how the flowers he used would not be completely open, but would reach their peak at the time of the party, Santiago performs a flowerlike organic growth with his body and arms, breaking free from the initial awkwardness of the composition.



Figure 7

Figure 8

Such gestures can be seen as the *punctum* to the director's *studium*, piercing and tearing at the fabric of the text. The retired butler may in fact have been aware of this dynamic that places gestures as a resource and defense against the spatial impositions of the film. In one of the few concessions made by João in 1992, he agrees to film what Santiago calls “the dance of hands,” which he claims to perform every morning as a form of exercise. The whimsical four-minute dance of hands is an antidote to the director's manipulations. Santiago uses screen space with completely autonomy and control. His hands go in and out of sight of the static camera, dividing his performance into two acts that end with a series of rapid movements, a flutter. The subtle caress of the papers and the vivid gesticulation during moments such as the flower description are part of a subtle gestural uprising that finds its ultimate expression in the dance of hands. Santiago offers no further explanation about this performance's meaning or purpose. João also withholds comment and simply presents the dance in the final film. The decision is fortunate, as this gestural performance emerges as the ultimate expression of resistance to directorial management.



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

After the various refusals of concession to Santiago and the instances in which his body is managed, the “dance of hands” is particularly interesting (Figures 9-11). While other scenes were characterized by the way Santiago's body was pushed deep

into space and surrounded by things, here we have the proximity of an extreme close-up. In the other shots his body is diminished and contained, manifested for instance in the proportional scale between body and things. In Figure 2, his head is the same size as the doorknob and his entire upper body is slimmer than the Remington case. In contrast, here the size of his hands is augmented, occupying the entire screen (an even more terrific effect on the big screen). More presentational and experiential than representational, this scene marks a rupture in the pattern of directorial control that otherwise imposes itself on the scene of filming. Recall the palms pressed against the windshield of *Bye bye Brazil*. In the Introduction, I suggested that the hands represented the way allegorical cinema contemplated and signified its alternative, the cinema of experience. As we saw in *Bye bye Brazil* and later in *Iracema*, cinema is a fertile site wherein tensions between experience and representation, between immediate sensation and structure come into view. In the dance of hands the body erupts in the scene not as a representation, such as the stickers of hands in *Bye bye Brazil*, but through an improvised corporeal performance by which experience asserts itself against the grain of imposed structures and seizes the moment of filming.

3 – *Edificio Master* and the Excavation of Ordinary Experience

Because of the belatedness with which *Santiago* recognizes the potentialities of the moment of filming, the film's excavation is limited to a retrieval of experience from the footage's indexical fossils and shards. Even at the moment of filming, João

already viewed Santiago's world nostalgically, as a museum of memories whose primary locus lay elsewhere. Thus, the moment of filming is presented as a failed one, punctuated by the director's impositions and refusals—a situation that, as I have argued, is counterpointed by Santiago's gestural performance, culminating in the “dance of hands” which, like Barthes “punctum,” pierces through the author's textual fabric and redirects the film's affective orientation from the painful returns of an “elsewhere” and a “before” to a performative present immanent to the scene of filming. By highlighting these aspects of *Santiago* we can fully appreciate the distinct qualities of *Edificio Master* in terms of its focus on the immediacy of site and situation at the moment of production. Coutinho's film is more than a record of life in an apartment building. The film inserts itself into the building's architectural and sensible space, into the material infrastructure as well as the building's audiovisual texture, in an attempt not only to locate the sites wherein experience subsists but to help create another experiential situation, thus becoming experience's ally.

Part of what makes *Edificio Master* an example of what I call apartment archaeologies is the primacy of the site, which here is a lower-middle-class apartment building in Copacabana, Rio. Although in *Santiago* sites become vitally important, we arrive at them via an approximation to the individual. In Coutinho's film, in contrast, the individuals and their experience are discovered through the excavation of the site. The focus is not on a theme, as in Coutinho's *Santo forte* (1999), which looks into contemporary religious experience, or on the experience of a particular historical moment, as in *Babilonia 2000* (2001), which takes place in the last days before the

turn of the millennium.⁷⁴ Nor is the film inspired by past or forthcoming events, as in the death of a peasant leader in *Cabra* or the imminent election of Lula in *Peões*. Although the conversations with the apartment dwellers are the most memorable element of *Edifício Master* (and we will turn to them in due time), the idea was site-centered from the start.

Consuelo Lins, who participated in the conception and production of the film, recalls that Coutinho wanted to make a film at an ordinary apartment building, one that was neither above average nor excessively deteriorated in socio-economic terms.⁷⁵ As an object of attention the “ordinary” becomes rather extraordinary. The category refers to things that are ubiquitous, yet hardly noticed. For all its apparent given-ness, the “ordinary” leads a secret life. Similarly to the way in which João, in films like *Entreatos* and *Nelson Freire*, turns to ordinary moments; that is, moments that seem uneventful and unimportant and for that reason are not the usual material of audiovisual attention, Coutinho looks for a site that is as common as it is easy to ignore.

This quest, I should note, is aligned with Coutinho’s recent interest in the middle-class as the bearers of a particular kind of marginality, similar to the “marginal majority” in which de Certeau’s “ordinary man” resides. Coutinho puts this in terms related to the valuation of the poor in leftist politics and religious ideology: “[The] poor, the outcast, the proletariat, for the Christian and for the revolutionary, these people are the salt of the earth. But the middle class is an absolute zero, nobody cares

⁷⁴ Both of which, by the way, have a specific location in two of Rio’s “favelas.”

⁷⁵ For these reasons, respectively, Coutinho rejected filming in a building on Avenida Atlântica and another that was next to the Favela do Cantagalo. See Consuelo Lins’ *O documentário de Eduardo Coutinho* for a history of this film and other films by Coutinho.

about them.” Those who are neither miserable nor greatly privileged constitute, for Coutinho, an impotent class “incapable of changing things, without historical interest” (cited in Lins *O documentário* 140). The members of this class seem, at a glance, indistinguishable from one another. In order to approach the experience of this marginal majority Coutinho searches out not the individuals, but their most emblematic site of dwelling, the apartment building.

Coutinho’s film is suggestive of an archaeological dig though not the belated, mournful excavation of the fossil or shard-image as in *Santiago*. Rather, the archaeological quality here is conferred by the way the camera and crew insert themselves into the materiality of the filming site, to the point that they rent an apartment in the building where they stay for several weeks before and during the filming. In this respect, the opening shots, which give the impression that Coutinho and his crew are burrowing into the building’s material structure, are telling. The first shot (which, aside from later views from the apartments’ windows, is the only one of the outside) shows the crew’s arrival from the perspective of one of the building’s security cameras (Figure 12). Then we cut to a shot of the crew in a narrow hallway, now viewed from one of their cameras, followed by another of them squeezing into an elevator (Figures 13 and 14). We see them, with some difficulty, through the cluttered visual space of the hall and elevator, a shot including the frame of the elevator door, which eventually closes on us, leaving only a black screen. Whereas in *Santiago*, the butler often seemed pushed deep into the apartment’s space, crowded and squeezed as a result of decisions of framing and mise-en-scene, here it is the filmmaking crew that is tightly placed, initiating their embedding into material space that will continue

throughout the film. Concluding the opening shots, we get a glimpse of one of the residential floors, an empty hall, dim and deep like a tunnel and filled with countless identical doors. Shots such as these will reoccur throughout the film, showing the crew's movement through the building's space that is suggestive of an excavation into a dense materiality.



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15

These opening shots, an initial burrowing into the materiality of the building, mark the entrance into an architectural site which, as I mentioned in the first pages of this chapter, creates multiple conditions of visibility and invisibility, privacy and disclosure. But this is not exclusively a phenomenon of solid infrastructure—of walls, halls, windows, doors, etc—but also one that presents a complex audiovisual

environment. The inclusion of the security camera here and in later parts of the film (when it again shows the crew moving through the building's tunnel-like hallways), has a double effect. First, it ensures that the filmmaker and crew are not just the enablers of certain forms of visibility but are themselves the objects of visibility (Lins *O Documentário* 152). The penetration into this space situates them deep within the building's environment, enveloped in the same conditions as the dwellers of the building, exemplifying what Jean Louis Comolli once prescribed as the necessary ethics of contemporary documentary in the age of the spectacle: instead of representing the real, the documentary must exist "under the risk of the real."⁷⁶ That is, it must expose itself and become vulnerable to the risks and conditions of the world it documents.

Second, it draws forth the regime of visibility that penetrates the building's space (a regime that also includes the television, but I will turn to this aspect below). The security cameras respond to practical concerns, understandable to anyone who has spent time in Rio. Furthermore, the building, in its recent past, had been the site of illegal activities including drug dealing and prostitution. Yet, the cameras also install a pervasive system of visibility comparable to Foucault's panoptical tower, which overexposes a surveyed space while retaining the opacity of those who exercise the disciplinary gaze. Seeing the images from the security monitor can also be disquieting as they reveal a cold world, seemingly stripped of intentionality and subjectivity. The people who enter into the space of visibility of the cameras are unspecific and

⁷⁶ Phrased in Comolli's contribution for the festival of documentary and ethnographic film, Forumdoc 2001, as cinema "sob o risco do real." As an aside, Comolli has become a regular visitor to Brazil and an active participant in discussions about documentary practice at Forumdoc and other venues.

anonymous, like non-auratic objects. They can, of course, attract attention should they behave in any way that requires disciplinary intervention. My main point here is not to unpack the intricacies of security camera images, but rather to show the way the film inserts itself into the regime of visibility that is installed in the architectural space and interacts with it. This creates moments thick with entanglements between forms of visibility—as when a camera films a monitor displaying the images of a security camera in which the crew operates yet another camera (Figure 12).

The excavation of the dwelling site is also an immersion into an acoustic world, as manifested by the fact that *Edificio Master* contains only diegetic sounds (with the brief exception of a voiceover introductory description of the building). The sounds that fill the building's space also make up the aural texture of the film. Thus, the feeling of spatial immersion is enhanced by sounds like the metal grumblings of the elevator, footsteps echoing in the barren hallways, the opening and shutting of doors. We also hear voices and music—sounds of a different order, as these are acoustic debris, indexes of experience dislodged from their private apartment contexts and incidentally reaching us in the empty hallways.

This acoustic continuity between lived space and film is an exemplary component of a broader process by which the increased investment in the moment of filming translates into longer takes (and therefore fewer cuts), the minimizing of explanatory voiceover, and the exclusive reliance on diegetic sound. In other words, we are speaking of the trimming-down of postproduction. *Santiago*, which makes abundant use of voiceover and non-diegetic music, operates by a logic in which the guiding consciousness of the film is situated spatially and temporally outside the

moment of filming. But whereas *Santiago* relates to that moment belatedly and by way of nostalgia, *Edificio Master* seeks immersion in the here-and-now of the site and situation of production.

That said, elements of the architecture of the building are subjected to particular attention. To explain this, I want to take Coutinho's brief voiceover at the beginning of the film: "276 apartments. About 500 inhabitants. 23 apartments per floor. We rented an apartment in the building for a month. With three crews, we filmed life there for one week." The comment serves to lay bare the conditions of the film's production, in a self-exposing gesture that is present in every film by Coutinho, in one form or another.⁷⁷

But the passage, a numerical inventory that includes six numbers in only three phrases, has other effects. Placed at a moment when we see a deep hallway replete with identical doors, the message speaks both to the building's staggering number of apartments and dwellers and to the homogenous serialization implied by this architectural structure, which, paradoxically, is meant to shelter singular, individual lives. That is, the numerical list reproduces the depersonalization implied by the standardized modern space in which people fit into identical, adjacent, and stacked-up slots. This is particularly intense in a building whose construction seems to respond only to practical and economic imperatives—being therefore stripped of any individualizing, aesthetic features. The numerical list and the view of the doors suggest quantity over quality, the factualness of data over the qualitative and the experiential. In this respect, the "ordinariness" of this site relates to a serialized and

⁷⁷ For example, in the inclusion of a scene in which Coutinho pays a participant in *Santo Forte*. Thus, the film includes the conditions of its production.

standardized order. Later in the film, a view from the apartments' windows shows identical adjacent buildings, magnifying the sense that these dwellings are indefinitely reproduced, architectural counterparts to the non-identity of the mass-produced object. Such structures can be seen as a monument to the decline of the aura, understood as the quality that emanates from uniqueness, as Benjamin argues in relation to aesthetic works in his "Work of Art" essay. As the radiance of the unique and the singular, the aura is threatened in the age of mechanical reproduction. The inventorying of the voiceover also conveys the sense that Edificio Master is a space akin to a giant file cabinet, an inventory in which lives find storage like non-auratic items on a shelf.

As Miriam Hansen notes in her analysis of aura in Benjamin's work, this is not the term's only meaning—and we will in fact deploy another in the last section of this chapter. The place of the term in Benjamin's thought is complicated by its modulation not only in meaning but also in political valence so that, depending on the context, Benjamin wavered between mourning aura's decline and calling for its complete destruction. Despite these complications, I am interested in the way Hansen secures the term's relevance to another of Benjamin's concerns, the crisis of experience:

For aura not only named the most precious facet among other types of experience he described as irrevocably in decline, to be grasped only through their historical erosion. Aura's epistemic structure, secularized and modernized (qua "profane illumination," Weimar *flânerie*, "mimetic faculty," and "optical unconscious"), can also be seen at work in Benjamin's efforts to reconceptualize experience through the very conditions of its *impossibility*, as the only chance to counter the bungled (capitalist-imperialist) adaptation of technology that first exploded in World War One and was leading to the fascist conquest of Europe (Hansen "Benjamin's" 338).⁷⁸

Rather than affixing the term semantically, Hansen places it in a conceptual

⁷⁸ For more, see her essay "Benjamin's Aura" as well as her excellent book on Kracauer, Benjamin, and Adorno titled *Cinema and Experience*.

constellation not unlike the one that informs this dissertation, particularly in relation to cinema's entanglements with experiences involving the "optical unconscious" (Chapter 1) and the "mimetic faculty" (Chapter 2). My goal in bringing Hansen's suggestive quote into this discussion is not meant as an intervention into the significance of the term in Benjamin's thought—a topic I defer to Benjamin scholars. Nor do I intend to chime in, with Agamben, in raising the stakes of Benjamin's concerns about the decline of experience by claiming its outright impossibility in contemporaneity.⁷⁹ Rather, I take Hansen's felicitous formulation because of its affinity with what is afoot in the apartment archaeology and its immersion into the phenomenological textures of apartment life. To quite an extent, this immersion can be understood as a quest not just to locate but also to aid experience through a cinematic intensification of the contact between humans and technologies of reproduction, a contact staged in one of contemporaneity's most ordinary, non-auratic dwelling sites.

The plunge into the homogenizing, non-auratic structure of the apartment building, performed with a simultaneous acknowledgement that this modern architectural space is penetrated by other technologies such as the security cameras, amounts to an excavation of the site of qualitative experience that subsists, and sometimes even thrives, in the interstices of these alienating macro-structures. Experience takes place within the bounds of this numbing homogeneity, which, as a material medium, conditions its possibilities and is both an inhibitor and an enabler of

⁷⁹ As he does in *Infancy and History*. I should note that if my goal were to engage directly with Benjamin's thought we would have to account for the fact that the single English term "experience" has two equivalents in German, *Erlebnis* and *Erfrahrung*, often translated as isolated experience and long experience, respectively. It is the latter that is said to decay in modernity. For a more historicized account of the crisis of experience in Benjamin see the chapter on him and Adorno in Martin Jay's *Song of Experience*.

ordinary forms of life.

It is from this perspective that Coutinho's conversations with the apartment dwellers can be appreciated. Besides the fact that they live in the same building, it is impossible to find a common thread connecting the people interviewed, an eclectic group including a street vendor, a retired Pan Am worker, a woman who works for an escort service, and a retired soap opera star. On a basic level the conversations document the dwellers' life experiences, often in ways that relate to the structural conditions of the spaces they inhabit. One man comments that what he finds overwhelming is not the eclectic diversity of people living in the building and in Copacabana but the concentration of people: "It's too much, for the love of God, I don't say that all social problems need to be combated, eliminated, and treated. Society doesn't have to be aseptic, but this is too much. . . . It is not that there are too many different sorts of people, but their concentration." Another tenant, a mild-mannered single mother, comments that the voices of others, entering through the kitchen windows, haunt her. The partitions meant to secure individual space prove to be insufficiently thick. Speaking of the streets of her neighborhood, she continues: "It's horrific. I'd like to kill the people that bump into me." But at other times even bleak stories are relayed with a sense of hope. A widow recalls that, years before, in a moment of despair she went to the window and was about to jump. Then she remembered that she still owed money to a department store and decided that it wasn't right to leave debts behind. Now, she says, she is happy to be alive.

Sometimes, too, the strange sociability of the building, which is more often than not an *anti*-sociability, based on anonymity and resentful forms of proximity

without intimacy, gives way to manifestations of communal bonds. One man, who fell in his apartment and went into a coma, had his life saved by a concerned neighbor. Another tenant, who is in his 70s, feels responsible for the senile, older couple living across the hall. A young woman, in counterpoint to the single mother I mentioned before, describes with warmth that, from the sounds that reach her apartment, she knows that a little girl named Tainá lives above her. Today, she tells Coutinho, “I finally saw her in the elevator with her mom.” She was embarrassed to say anything but clearly enjoyed “meeting” the girl. Emblematic of these small forms of sociability, in one candid scene we are again in the tunnel-like hallway of doors, when we see a boy coming home. He walks by a cat standing in front of a closed door. The boy gets to his own door, several doors down, and hesitates. Then he returns and helps the cat back to its home.



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19

In the backgrounds of living rooms, bedrooms, and kitchens, where these conversations take place, we often see a television screen (Figures 16-19). In Figure 16, as the group burrows in a densely packed apartment, we see the television glaring at the end of the hall. Just as film creates a form of visibility we are reminded of another, simultaneously operating in the space. In Figures 18 and 19, the television is seen deep in the rooms and, much like Santiago's body, it is framed by the shot as well as by the lines created by furnishings and objects. In Figure 17, a particularly interesting arrangement places the interviewed couple in between the camera and the TV, held in between apparatuses of visibility.

These inclusions of the TV remind us that the regime of visibility of the apartment building also includes these private screens. While on one hand, in the shared parts of the building, we find the security apparatus that overexposes space in the service of a removed disciplinary gaze. On the other hand, in the private apartments, we find the television, in relation to which the people viewed by the security apparatus become the removed viewers. We should note, as others have done, that the television programming has no interest in giving visibility to ordinary lives—except in the reporting of disasters on the eight o'clock news or through the “spectacular investment of the banal” that takes place in reality shows (Guimarães “O retorno” 81). Coutinho's cinema, also a technology of visibility that inserts itself in between these two arguably alienating technologies, can be seen as an intervention. The film's careful inclusion of security camera images coupled with the incidental but frequent presence of televisions help to locate the film's activity within a technological field, a matrix, wherein it offers another audiovisual possibility

interested in giving ordinary lives visibility on their own terms. In accordance with this intent, Coutinho's film imposes few expectations and restrictions on its participants—thus, the irreducible diversity of discourses, which cannot be used to advance any single idea or ideological premise.

The film is interesting because, in its excavation, it brings forth the qualitative variety of lives that unfold in the homogenizing material space of the building. Responding to the film's success in the theaters, "Revista Programa," the cultural addendum to the newspaper *Journal do Brasil*, took interest in the film but completely missed this point when it invited its readers to give numerical values to each of the film's participants. The paper published names and descriptions of each person in the film and the readers could give them a 1-10 grade. In so doing, the paper inverts the logic of the film, which goes from the homogenizing infrastructure of the site and its staggering numerical details (276 apartments, 500 inhabitants, etc.) to qualitative experience that cannot be quantified. Moreover, the paper's approach illustrates the sensibility of the media industry specifically manifested in reality shows, which only finds the lives of ordinary people interesting if they can be placed into some sort of competition, at once made banal and spectacular in the process of becoming mass entertainment.

Similar to the way the film inserts itself into a field of audiovisual possibilities while providing another possibility, the film's immersion into the building's space is also the constitution of another space, which we may call film space. Indeed, spatial references are better suited than thematic ones to explain Coutinho's cinematic practice. Rather than a theme or a script (which he absolutely never uses), Coutinho's

films are organized by determining a situation of filming. In the past he has referred to this approach as a “prison” in the sense that it sets the limits for the operations of filming. More recently he uses the term *dispositivo*, which refers to the film’s procedure or set of procedures. In *Edificio Master* the *dispositivo* is to move into a large building, develop a relationship with the inhabitants, and have conversations about their lives. Thus the *dispositivo* does not determine the content of the film but sets up the circumstances of filming by creating a spatially determined scene of production. This, and not a narrative or a thematic arc, structures the film. The scenes in *Edificio Master* follow the order in which they were filmed, confirming the primacy of procedure over intentional content, as well as illustrating the film’s archaeological sensibility. Following a sedimentary approach, images are presented as layers of an excavation rather than used as parts of a narrative or argument. The *dispositivo* of production creates a structure, a boundary, which, analogous to an architectural space, delimits but also enables certain forms of expression, agency, and experience.

Analogous to the way the film inserts itself in an audiovisual regime while also providing the possibility of another relationship to the medium, it also inserts itself into an inhabited architectural space while constituting its own inhabitable space at the scene of filming. It is in this sense that the film combines a documentation of the life in the building that places it, as Comolli would claim, “under the risk of the real,” with an attempt to form an allegiance with experience by providing it with an innovative productive circumstance. We get a glimpse of the productiveness of this situation in several conversations in which the participants take noticeable pleasure in their interaction with the audiovisual. One man, who warns that he is shy and stutters,

speaks fluidly and eloquently about his life. Close to tears, he concludes by thanking the director for the opportunity to “make public” (“por a public”) the fact that, despite difficulties, “he lives a life of dignity.” He understands the filming as a unique opportunity to leave a positive mark in the audio-visual archive. Another participant, a woman who is agoraphobic and avoids human contact (“I am happy when I manage to take the elevator without running into anyone”), seems, nevertheless, to welcome the opportunity of being in a film. She shares her poetry and artwork, which she seems to understand as therapeutic processes and forms of resistance, tools to survive in a world that otherwise might swallow her. Showing one of her artworks, she says, “I know that aesthetically it’s ridiculous, but I don’t care about that. On that day I resolved many problems, it was a balm.” This emphasis of process over product seems curiously aligned with *Edifício Master*—and indeed with the cinemas of experience in general, which establish a different balance between film as process and film as product. Also, by valuing the therapeutic over the aesthetic, this woman may come close to the general approach of the cinema of experience. Rather than using bodies as signifying tools in the service of arguments or narratives, this cinema strives to create situations in which bodies make use of cinema—cases in point being the stutterer who doesn’t stutter and the agoraphobic who braves the scene of filming and shines in the film.

There are other dimensions and consequences to the procedures of the film that may also explain the motivation behind people’s decisions to talk to Coutinho and his crew. Although personal motivations are impossible to ascertain, Lins suggests that the isolated inhabitants may sense in the film “the opportunity to retake contact, to come out of isolation . . . to establish, who knows, a new network” (160). The film

does offer an alternative link that, despite the individual conversations in private spaces, gives individuals another possible context for being in common. Anonymous elevator riders become linked by their common participation in the film.

In this sense the film bears comparison with what the curator and theorist Nicolas Bourriaud has described under the rubric of “relational aesthetics.” Relational works, he argues, are those that are not interested in the work of art as a finished product with aesthetic value but in open-ended, collaborative works that establish new and ongoing forms of sociability: “Each particular artwork is a proposal to live in a shared world, and the work of every artist is a bundle of relations with the world, giving rise to other relations, and so on and so forth, *ad infinitum*” (22). Bourriaud’s formulation, which refers primarily to art installations, speaks to the way that the transformation of film I have been describing represents a move from the aesthetic ideals of the work of art and towards cinema as a productive shared space whose primary spatio-temporal location is the here-and-now of filming. While *Santiago* mourns the way the experiential potential of the moment of filming was sacrificed for aesthetic imperatives, *Edificio Master* seems to negotiate between its ambition to be a finished film and to be an experiential process. We will now turn to *Rua de mão dupla*, which digs deeper into the material stuff of the apartment site while going much further in creating a shared experiential situation, even a community of sense constituted through the relational power of excavated objects.

4 – The Archaeology of Experience and the Experience of Archaeology

Rua de mão dupla, the 2004 project by Cao Guimarães, goes beyond the commitment to experience in the moment of filming and seeks full-fledged complicity with it. Film production and experience become co-articulated. Placed in relation to the other apartment archaeologies, this film augments every important aspect we have discussed so far. In a radical yielding to the moment of filming, the production of the film's footage is relegated to the participants themselves. There is not just an attitude of yielding to the participants—as performed in retrospect in *Santiago's* mourning or through film's full-bodied insertion into the world of *Edifício Master*—but a literal handing over of the means of production, entailing a collaborative redistribution of productive agency. This yielding of the camera, combined with other aspects of the film that we will discuss, is particularly potent in making the production of cinema an experiential occasion rather than a process of representation. *Rua* plunges deep into the apartment site, performing a more intense excavation than our previous examples. Simultaneously, it creates an experiential situation for the people involved while also suggesting new possibilities for audiovisual production in general.

The project involved the participation of six apartment dwellers in the city of Belo Horizonte, who were divided into three pairs. As Lins explains in her description of the making of the film, these pairs consist of a musical producer and a justice official, a builder and an architect, a writer and a poet. It is significant, however, that the film does not communicate detailed information about the participants, but simply introduces them with brief intertitles such as this: “Eliane Lacerda and Rafael Soares exchanged homes for 24 hours, each in possession of a movie camera. They did not

know each other.” Alone in each other’s homes, the participants can film whatever and however they wish. At the end of the 24-hour period, they sit in front of the camera and verbally construct an image of the missing person, reconstituting the absent body from the traces left on objects and surfaces of the dwelling. In addition, the participants also film themselves sitting quietly in their own homes. In a manner similar to Coutinho’s use of the *dispositivo*, the film does not determine its content, but establishes instead, clear parameters of production. Here the *dispositivo* can also be thought as an example of what sociologist Stephen Turner calls “boundary organizations,” which determine the spatial limits and set of rules that provide “a framework of flexible mutual expectations” (cited in Basualdo and Laddaga 199). At any rate, the film has its own structural conditions of experience even as it plunges into material structural conditions of the middle-class apartment.

Although he has ultimate control over the finished film, the director also works within certain parameters. He edits the material, reducing its length and deciding in what order each set of images will be presented. Yet, Cao does not alter the chronology of each participant’s footage. By keeping the footage in chronological order, the director respects the integrity of each participant’s filming while also demonstrating the archaeological sensibility that, in one form or another, we have detected in the previous films. He preserves the order of the footage as an archaeologist keeps track of the layers of an excavation, attentive to the relative order of the findings—similar to the way Coutinho retains the conversations in *Edificio Master* in the order they were filmed and the narrator, from time to time, signals the relative order of the 1992 images in *Santiago*. Cao presents the edited footage on a

screen divided in two, incorporating in its form the simultaneity of the apartment switch performed by each pair of participants. In Figure 20 below, we see Rafael's footage in Eliane's house on the left and Eliane's in Rafael's house on the right. Figure 21 shows Rafael describing Eliane while she sits on the right looking at the camera as if she, too, were listening to the spoken portrait of her made by the stranger sitting at her home (Lins 3).



Figure 20



Figure 21

The participants in effect excavate each other's apartments as if these were archaeological sites whose material surfaces and objects can speak to the absent

dwellers' presence. Thus, the film sets the conditions for the recovery of absent bodies in such a way that every object and surface becomes charged with the possibility of hiding a clue or intimating a secret about their habitual user. Given the dwellers' absence, it is not surprising that the film's inventory of objects is far greater than in the other apartment archaeologies we discussed. We look into bathroom drawers, closets, fridges, and gaze at a myriad of small things, from decorative statuettes to worn-out Brillo pads. The participants confront and analyze the *mise-en-scene* of everyday life like critics who suspect that the placement of objects is potentially encrypted with meaning. Thus one participant, in an unexplained moment of paranoia, suspects that the dweller has left false clues for him, placed objects and photos to mislead his investigation. Another is impressed by the vagueness and incoherence of the items she finds in an apartment. She muses that her own apartment would give a coherent sense of what kind of person she is—by which she means the amalgam of what she likes, believes, and does. In contrast, she finds the composition of objects in the apartment she visits to be too feebly put together, with contradictory elements and lacunae, as if the space had not been fully inhabited by its owner. These analyses of *mise-en-scene* curiously relocate the task of the critic to the profilmic event. We come to realize that the dweller's arrangement of objects in the apartment is akin to the director's composition of a scene. Decorating an apartment is the placing of things in the main scene of one's life. It involves aesthetic and narrative considerations that are never stated but are potentially encrypted in and retrievable from the space's composition. Yet, in these living spaces, what is intentionally placed may be less abundant, and at times even less interesting than what is distractedly placed, the un-thought and

unintentional stuff of life. In the almost compulsive search for clues, our gaze often rests on the most disenchanted objects, such as a bare lightbulb, a doorknob, and even a garbage can. In Figure 22, one of the participants tries to guess the identity of the dweller in a black-and-white photo while his counterpart stares at a shabby, padlocked gate as if it could tell a story. Also in a seemingly compulsive manner, some of the participants zoom in and out repeatedly as if these approximations and retreats could tease out some hidden meaning.



Figure 22

Recall from our discussion of the fossil and the shard in *Santiago* that the indexical image is the inscription of a former presence that bears witness to the presence's passing. Because of the ambiguity between presence and absence brought about by the photographic image, some thinkers locate in it the continuity of presence. Edgar Morin, for instance, writes that the photo, as souvenir, "can itself be called life regained, perpetuated presence" (18). But more often than not the logic of trace prevails in the understanding of the image. This is evident in Kracauer's example of

the grandmother, which I discussed earlier in this chapter. Sontag, in her brilliant *On Photography*, observes that by fixing a moment in the indexical image we register the moment's passing. More than preserving our youth, an old photo of ourselves exposes our ageing. Thus, the image can be "the inventory of mortality," a moment invested with "posthumous irony" (70). Following the logic of trace, Lippit concludes in a recent essay that cinema is "an apparatus to produce lost bodies" (114). One of the fundamental ingredients of Cao's experiment is to take the ambiguous quality of the presence of absence that obtains posthumously, in the image, and relocate it to the very moment of production. By literally displacing bodies from their sites, Cao makes the sense of the presence of absence the film's constitutive point of departure. The logic of trace is not to be found in the image of the body, but rather in the experience of the body's space and everyday objects, which are potentially impregnated with the vanished presence. It is in relation to this that I want to bring the aura back into this discussion.

As I mentioned before, for Benjamin the relevance of the aura is not limited to the changing status of the artwork as a result of mechanical reproducibility. Nor is the meaning of the concept restricted to the radiance of the original or the unique. Rather, it names a phenomenon that pertains, in a more general sense, to the relationship between humans and objects. Regarding a photograph of Schiller, Benjamin comments on the philosopher's coat: "the shape it has borrowed from its wearer is not unworthy of the wrinkles in his face" ("Little" 514). The relationship between the wrinkles on the face and the shape of the coat suggests a displacement of qualities, a metonymic slip by which the object becomes endowed with qualities of its user. Later

in the same essay, he imagines a nineteenth century scene of portrait photography and writes: “the photographer was confronted, in the person of every client, with a member of the rising class equipped with an aura that had seeped into the very folds of the man’s frock coat or floppy cravat” (“Little” 517). The aura here is not linked to the singularity of the objects (which could just as well have been mass-produced), but to the way in which they become charged with traces of their users. Using different terms than Benjamin, we could say that in these passages the aura names an affective contamination between people and things—reminiscent of the radioactive fossil, a suggestive term Deleuze uses rather in passing when speaking of “recollection images” (*Cinema 2* 113). Supporting this notion of affective contamination, the “Baudelaire” essay explicitly describes the aura as a transfer of characteristics that pertain to the relationship between humans onto the relationship between humans and objects. Thus, just as we expect a person to return our gaze, we come to expect objects to look back. “Inherent in the gaze,” Benjamin writes, “is the expectation that it will be returned by that on which it is bestowed. Where the expectation is met, there is an experience of the aura in all its fullness” (“On Some” 338). The aura, then, is the experiential phenomenon by which remnants of human contact remain lodged in an object to the point that they seem endowed with the human capacity to communicate with us, to return our gaze.

In this configuration, the aura names not just the perceived capacity of the object to accumulate and radiate its particular history of human contact, but also its capacity to serve as a mediator of social relations. Interestingly, in the “Photography” essay, Benjamin goes on to uphold the work of French photographer Eugène Atget as

being among the first to “disinfect the stifling atmosphere generated by conventional portrait photography”—a formulation that refers us back to the scene in which the upper-class gentleman with frock and cravat poses for his portrait. Leaving behind subject-centered portraiture, Atget photographs deserted street scenes and architectural details such as “a gas lamp, or a gable wall, or a lamppost” (518). Atget presents a non-auratic world precisely because he displaces the body, thus displacing the normal social configurations to which the material details belong. Because of the removal of the human body, his images are compared to crime scenes (527).⁸⁰ In the “Work of Art” essay, Benjamin elaborates that the political significance of the images rests on the fact that they “unsettle the viewer” and demand a new kind of reception (258). The street scenes and architectural details are reminiscent of Kracauer’s photograph of a grandmother which, as it loses the aura given by familial explanation and context, becomes a conglomeration of dehumanized objects clinging to a lifeless mannequin—though here the dehumanization is not the effect of the photograph’s aging but by the removal of bodies which dislodges the material world from its normal social context. By displacing the human element entirely, the photos become like crime scene to which the viewers play the role of detectives. Or, instead of detectives, we may regard viewers of such deserted spaces as archaeologists looking for traces of social relations and disappeared bodies in objects suddenly rendered as debris.

I bring up Benjamin’s ruminations because of the affinity between his reflections and Cao’s experiment, which also unsettles the relationship between

⁸⁰ In the “Work of Art” essay he takes up the example of Atget again: “It has been justly said that he photographed [the streets of Paris] like scenes of crimes. A crime scene, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence” (258).

humans and objects. The abandoned sites of Atget's photographs, in which objects seem to be "cast adrift," are not unlike apartments vacated by their dwellers. The apartments can even be compared to the clothing Benjamin's essay describes, as the spaces of the dwellings are in effect worn by their inhabitants, creased and marked by their bodies so that the place's surface features may not be "unworthy . . . of the wrinkles in [their] face." Cao's film sets up a situation in which the material stuff of the apartment world, non-auratic both as a result of its ordinariness and of its belonging to a complete stranger, is asked to whisper its secrets, to return the viewer's gaze. The compulsive gleaning of surfaces and objects is the working of the same sensibility that looks for traces of human presence lodged in the folds of a frock coat.

Like the photographs discussed by Benjamin, Cao's experiment unsettles the relationship between humans and objects so that it creates conditions for the extraordinary experience of the most ordinary things. In keeping with the interests of experiential cinema, in Cao's film this unsettling experience is not restricted to the after-effect of the image on a viewer but inheres in the very moment of production. Much as the ambiguity of presence in the indexical is not a belated effect but is made manifest at the time of filming, so too the world of objects is rendered anew not just as an effect of its reproduction, but as a condition of experience at the moment of production. Lippit's pithy phrase—that cinema produces lost bodies—cannot aptly describe *Rua*, which starts with the removal of bodies and amounts to an exercise in their recovery. The bodies' withdrawal, which unsettles the material world in Atget's photos, is in *Rua* not a byproduct of imaging but its precondition. The participants, wielding the camera in space unsettled by the removal of inhabitants are themselves

the detectives or archaeologists excavating—with the audiovisual device as a tool—the object-world. Thus, *Rua* creates the conditions not only for the archaeology of experience, but for the experience of archaeology.

The recovery is performed by each participant, who is simultaneously the disappeared body of another site, presented on the adjacent screen. The most prosaic objects offer vital clues. One woman looks in the bristles of a hairbrush to discover the color of the user's hair. From the size of his cooking pots she imagines him as a small, slim man (which she later confirms by the size of his clothes). The builder deduces from the items on a desk that the owner teaches but does not practice architecture. From the six pillows on the architect's bed, he infers a lonely man. The poet at first envisions his unknown partner as overweight, perhaps because he is impressed by the relative opulence of the place in comparison to his sparse dwelling. Impressed by the number of precious objects decorating the apartment, he then reconsiders and envisions her as a slim woman moving graciously through so many things. The types of food he finds in the kitchen—brown rice, for instance—confirm this revised image.

Meanwhile, this quest to recover the absent bodies exposes the six participant-archaeologists in a variety of ways. The second pair (the architect and the builder) pay particular attention to the structural elements of their very distinct apartments. The builder, staying in the modernist Edifício Niemeyer (perhaps the only apartment in this chapter that can claim an aura of originality), at first enjoys the place, before the curved walls and the vintage fixtures begin to bother him. This is not the kind of space he finds “inhabitable,” he comments. Meanwhile, the architect on the adjacent screen elaborates at length on the middle-class nature of his counterpart's building. Because

of the ordinary quality of its structural design and finish, he observes that the building could be nearly anywhere in Belo Horizonte. Here he touches the heart of the “ordinary” as that which is ubiquitous to the point of lacking specific characteristics, to the point of being mutually interchangeable. But he concedes, too, that even here one can find “hidden beauties.” These two unlikely mates are oddly capable of imaging each other, including details such as professions, hobbies, temperaments, and facial hair. Also they are not without shared interests. At one point, both of their cameras gaze at the symbol of Atlético, one of Belo Horizonte’s soccer teams. Coincidentally, the team had played and won that very day. The architect confessed that he called the builder (“I knew where he was staying”) to congratulate him, but nobody answered.

Structural differences also become a subject for the third pair. While Eliane lives in an upper-middle-class apartment, Roberto lives in one that is barren, in disrepair, and located in a low-income neighborhood. Thus Eliane’s encounter with this world is also a confrontation with class differences. From her comments, we learn that there was a party nearby but she was surprised that instead of “pagode” or “axé” (musical genres that are, correctly or not, associated with lower classes) she only heard “good music.” At one point, she thought she heard gunshots, but they turned out to be balloons, popped at the end of the party. Eliane herself, speaking to the camera, recognizes the value of the experience as a healthy confrontation with class prejudice. Roberto, in turn, has some difficulty adapting to the relative opulence of Eliane’s home, “with so many things that he couldn’t even find use for.” Of all the participants, he is the one who seems most affected by the switch. He confesses that he chose to

sleep in the living room. Rather than prying too deeply into Eliane's things, he spends a substantial amount of time filming the outside from a window. Emotional and perhaps depressed, he admits to having wept while imagining his counterpart enduring the barrenness of his home. Roberto, who suggests that "others should also switch homes once in a while," concludes by formulating a pithy question: "What is the meaning of this intimacy we feel in someone else's space?" This is a crucial question—and it is arguably for this reason that Cao used his discretionary power to place Roberto's monologue at the end of the film.

The participants' invocations of each other from the material contents of their apartments, taking place in switched homes and on adjacent screens, are not only exercises in retrieving lost bodies but are also productive of intimate encounters in absentia. The stuff of the apartments, gleaned for clues and traces of an absent other, is transformed from meaningless debris into relational objects mediating the relationship between complete strangers. To ask that these objects speak, that they return the gaze, is to invite the glow of their aura—though of course not in the sense of the cult or art object that Benjamin describes in the "Work of Art" essay. The apartment switch and the use of the movie camera create the conditions for the enchantment of quotidian objects, the material debris of life, so that they may serve as affective links in a new form of experience of sociability between members of a participatory community, which, however momentarily, emerges in the process of the film's production. As archaeology, the film plunges deepest into the non-auratic world of the private apartment, into the small things that line these ordinary hideouts, while simultaneously creating an extraordinary shared experience. As it inaugurates new forms of sociability

through its participatory process of production, the film is more apt than *Edificio Master* as an example of relational aesthetics.

One should not just celebrate the democratic potential of art simply because its production becomes collaborative. Against Bourriaud, critics have aptly pointed out that democracy may have more to do with the possibility of dissent than with consensual collaboration (Ross 86-8) and that what matters is not participation *per se* but the specifics of who participates and in what manner (Bishop 67).⁸¹ Although these criticisms of Bourriaud are appropriate, the notion of relational aesthetics does describe “a rising culture of the arts” (Laddaga 7) and can be revisited and revised without regressing to naïve celebrations of the democratization it implies. Though films have remained unmentioned or on the margins of discussions of relational aesthetics, the manner in which the cinema of experience displaces emphasis from the finished product onto the interactions and collaborations at the moment of production makes them relevant. They are comparable to works of art that, in the words of Bourriaud, function as relational devices, machines “provoking individual and group encounters” (30). More nuanced than Bourriaud, Basualdo and Laddaga recently argued that relational works create “experimental communities” and practice a small-scale politics. This politics is not one of revolutionary transformations but of “minor tinkering” (211), practiced “by inventing devices and providing resources for dialogues in which forms of knowledge, imaginaries, and social relations can be . . . enhanced, and developed” (198). In the case of the films central to this dissertation, I would say *experiential* communities would be more apt—particularly in a film like

⁸¹ For a nuanced collection of essays on the topic, see the anthology *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, edited by Hiderliter et al.

Rua, in which the participants are linked, more than anything else, by experience.

Early in this chapter I stated that, by delving into the apartment archaeologies I also hoped to inquire into the operations of a politics that, accompanying cinema's phenomenological relocation to a world of small spaces and things, is admittedly modest in scope. This politics hinges on exploring possibilities for human relationships mediated by the processes and apparatus of film. The projects do not respond to the naïve notion of democracy that Bishop criticizes in Bourriaud—though the redistribution of productive agency among a small number of participants is a primary concern. By plunging into these spaces of solitude, these small apartments (which often have a single occupant), the films do not advance an idea of community founded on participants being together but rather on a shared experience of being apart. Jean Luc-Nancy, whose attempt to think of community beyond the horizons of totalitarian and utopian, revolutionary politics, imagined that it must be founded on its impossibility. The community, Nancy suggests, is not a communion of beings but the experience of their spacing and dislocation, “the sharing that makes them others” (Nancy 25), rather than a bond that unifies them. The apartment archaeology explores this strange form of sharing, which could be described as the intimations of proximity in the absence of intimacy for the inhabitants of Edifício Master, or the palpable intimacy without physical proximity for the participants in *Rua*. Nancy's attempt to formulate community as the experience of spacing and dislocation, rather than as a coming together, is particularly appropriate to describe *Rua*, where the creative dislocation, at once an approximation and a removal, produces a community at a distance through the materiality of spaces and objects, the solid bounds of their shared

solitude.

In keeping with the cinema of experience, the primary site of these films' politics is the scene of filming, the moment of production and the types of relations that emerge in that moment. By placing emphasis on the moment of production rather than on the aesthetic form of the final product, this turn is also a displacement of aesthetics. Of the examples I have analyzed here, *Santiago* is, in a traditional aesthetic sense, the most accomplished. The combination of black-and-white photography, careful composition, and non-diegetic music and narration combine into what is doubtlessly a satisfying aesthetic work. Yet, it is also a film that mourns the price that the realization of its aesthetic vision exacted from the moment of filming. It would be a mistake to underestimate Coutinho's aesthetic vision, but his films have imperatives that take precedence in determining form. Because of these imperatives, Coutinho's films are stylistic understated and attentive to what emerges in the moment—so that one is more likely to remember improvised gestures and conversations than aesthetic elements. Finally, Cao's film is forceful in its abdication of an authorial aesthetic conception. The director refuses to control the shooting style of the participants and, as a result, the film displays the typical characteristics of amateur footage, such as random lighting, unsteady camera, and excessive use of the zoom. Stylistically uneven and with only diegetic sounds, *Rua* has a raw quality that reflects the project's commitment to making the most of the experiential potential of the moment of production, even if at the expense of the film as a finished work of artistic value.

Without making it a prescriptive film, we can say that *Rua*, by sharing the means of production with its participants, suggests new practices for a cinema of

experience. One could also posit, though, that by going so far in the abdication of aesthetic unity in favor of experiential event, the film may reach toward a territory that, for better or worse, is simply beyond the terrain of cinema. To pose it as a question, how far can the shift in emphasis from final product to participatory process go before we can no longer think of a project as cinema? In this regard it would be vital to reflect on other experiments—including a historical antecedent, Aluisio Raulino's *Jardim Nova Bahia*, a short documentary from 1971 in which the camera also switches hands. But I reserve this reflection, which relocates us to other spaces, for the conclusion. In this chapter we remain in the apartment, exchanging glances with absent strangers through small, ordinary things.

Conclusion:

Cinema's Ruptures and Reinventions

What are the horizons of the cinema of experience? The following pages draw out some of the implications of experiential practices and discuss them through related contemporary projects, many of which emerge at the borders of cinema as we know it. For starters, by emphasizing lived events at the moment of filming instead of at the moment of reception, experiential films relocate the site of politics to the scene of production and in so doing sidestep problems of viewership that have undermined much of political cinema. Because of its limited audience, the revolutionary ambitions of *cinema novo* always seemed quixotic. How can the radical, anti-bourgeois "esthetics of hunger," as upheld in Glauber Rocha's 1964 manifesto and exemplified by master examples of *cinema novo*, have a significant impact if its viewing public consists primarily of cinema aficionados and the leftist intelligentsia?⁸² The ambitions of revolutionary cinema are thwarted by the realities of distribution and attendance. The problem, moreover, is not exclusively lack of distribution (as Carlos Diegues suggests), but also rests on matters of taste. Despite leftist filmmakers' desire to impact the larger public, popular taste betrays the hopes of revolutionary aesthetics.

⁸² Glauber's thesis is that *cinema novo* makes the historic conditions of misery and hunger into an aesthetic principle, the source of its revolutionary thrust. "We know . . . that this hunger will not be cured by moderate governmental reforms and that the cloak of technicolor cannot hide, but only aggravates, its tumors. Therefore, only a culture of hunger . . . can surpass itself qualitatively; the most noble cultural manifestation of hunger is violence. . . . Cinema novo is . . . an evolving complex of films that will ultimately make the public aware of its own misery" (70-71).

As if by a logic of inverse proportion, the greater the revolutionary ambition of a film, the smaller and more selective is its public.

I do not have to elaborate on the details of this problem, which has haunted the politics of the avant-garde almost from the outset. My point is that the cinema of experience, intentionally or not, sidesteps questions of viewership by placing emphasis on the possibilities of the moment of filming. To be sure, I am not claiming that experiential films necessarily abdicate their relationship with viewers. What I am claiming is that, to varying degrees, these films' investment shifts from the postproduction effects of the finalized film to the materiality and open-endedness of the moment of production, the interactions and experiences enabled by filmmaking.

This emphasis on the moment of production, however, causes not only a dislocation of politics but also of aesthetics. The investment in the process rather than the product can even lead one to wonder whether some of the films that this dissertation discusses illustrate an evolving approach to cinema or the emergence of an entirely distinct form.⁸³ I believe that it is appropriate to discuss the examples included in this dissertation under the category of "cinema" because, whatever possibilities they may explore at the moment of filming, Coutinho, João Salles, Cao Guimarães, and others still release finished works, shown in theaters and distributed to a viewing public. Production has not become an end in itself—at least not to the point of precluding the finalization of the works in film form. To borrow Diana Taylor's vocabulary, we could say that the films' investment in the "repertoire," the ephemeral and performative bodily practices that exist only in the embodied present, coexists

⁸³ In a recent presentation of a paper on *Cabra*, I was asked precisely this question.

with cinema as an “archival” practice. Moreover, the changing equilibrium between film as process and as product has resulted in remarkable works, in my view fully comparable to the best of *cinema novo*—thus invigorating rather than undoing cinema. Yet, the emphasis on process rather than product can only go so far before we are confronted with practices that bear little resemblance to cinema.

Chapter Three concludes with a particularly intense example of the liminality of experiential practices, manifested in the yielding gesture of handing the camera over to the film’s participants. *Rua de mão dupla*, with its duplication of screens and displacement of the directorial role, is certainly on the outer region of cinema’s territory, on the border of art and video installation—which is, in fact, the form in which the film was first presented to the public at the 25th *Bienal de arte de São Paulo*, titled “Metropolitan Iconographies.”⁸⁴ The passing over of the camera, a gesture that radically redistributes productive agency, is emblematic of experiential cinema, and has several important antecedents and variations in recent works, as I will detail.

O prisioneiro da grade de ferro: autoretratos (Prisoner of the Iron Bars: Self Portraits), a project directed by Paulo Sacramento and released in 2003, is a strong example of the redistribution of the control of the technology of filming. Before beginning his documentary on everyday life at Carandirú, Brazil’s largest detention center, Sacramento organized video workshops for the prisoners so that they would themselves be capable of filming.⁸⁵ In *Prisioneiro*, the camera changes hands

⁸⁴ For an analysis of the film as the intersection of documentary and contemporary art practices, see Consuelo Lins’ essay “Rua de mão dupla: documentário e arte contemporânea,” available at http://www.videobrasil.org.br/ffdossier/Ruademaodupla_ConsueloLins.pdf.

⁸⁵ Carandirú, operational between 1956 and 2002, was notorious for many reasons. At one point it was the largest prison in Latin America. Also, in 1992 a prisoner uprising resulted in the massacre of

repeatedly, revealing the perspective of the prisoners in their day-to-day lives. This approach, evocative of Cao's otherwise very distinct film, has an important antecedent in Alouysio Raulino's *Jardim Nova Bahia*. In this unusual short from 1971, Deutrudes, a São Paulo car washer who is the main character in the documentary, films part of the footage. As Bernadet argues in *Cineastas e a imagem do povo*, through this gesture Raulino's film takes the sociological model of the documentary close to its point of rupture, but falls short by performing a "stylistic recuperation" of the car washer's footage, accomplished through editing and the use of non-diegetic sound (Bernadet 118). *Jardim Nova Bahia* flirts with a radical engagement with alterity, but ultimately domesticates it, appropriating Deutrudes' footage into the director's aesthetic style in postproduction.⁸⁶

Insofar as Sacramento controls the final edition of his film, a similar critique could apply, but in *Prisioneiro* no "recuperation of style" takes place. The prisoners' long sequences are presented with few edits and only diegetic sound, occasionally including narration made during the act of filming—as opposed to afterwards in voiceover. Indeed, this approach results in a work that concedes so little to viewers' normal expectations that it is difficult, at times nauseating, to watch. The camera changes shoulders without clear transitions and takes us deep into the prison's abject conditions. This noncompliance is precisely the source of the film's force, the way in

more than a hundred inmates. In 1999, Dráuzio Varella, who was a volunteer physician in the prison, published a well-received, muckraking book describing the prisoners' living conditions, the revolt, and the massacre. In turn, the book inspired Hector Babenco's well-known fictionalization of the events in *Carandiru* (2003). In 2002, the prison was closed and most of its buildings demolished except for one wing, which now houses a museum.

⁸⁶ We can also assume that, given the complexity and cost of operating a film camera, Raulino must have participated actively in Deutrudes' filming. With digital cameras the process is simplified and the participatory possibilities of production enhanced.

which it gives visibility to what is not usually part of the sensible, in Rancière's sense.⁸⁷

The indigenous media collaborative "Video nas Aldeias" also explores the democratizing gesture of yielding the means of production. Presented in their 1989 film *Video nas Aldeias*, the goal was "to promote the encounter of indigenous peoples and their images." In an initial stage this involved filming events and rituals at the request of indigenous people so as to allow the encounter between them and their reproduced images—in a sort of displaced version of what Robert Stam calls "the primal scene" (*Tropical 7*). But here the momentous encounter is not with the European other, but with the self's double, the self's technologically reproduced image. Evocative of the interactions between bodies and images discussed in Chapter Two, these encounters also produce synergies between the audiovisual and embodied experience. In the case of the Nabaquara people, for instance, viewing a video of their performance of a ritual dance leaves them dissatisfied with their performance and, as a consequence, triggers a revival of the tribe's traditions. The Nabaquara improved their performance and asked to be filmed again. Further, following this event, old traditions were unearthed by the tribe, such as a nose-piercing ritual that had not been performed in over twenty years and was now done in front of the camera. Part of what is interesting in this example is that the natives' images are not extracted to be stored in a

⁸⁷ Illustrative of the film's lack of concessions to viewership expectations, it includes a number of medium close-up shots of mutilated corpses, which we are led to assume are casualties of the 1992 massacre. But the images are bluntly presented, uncushioned by rhetorical devices that could contextualize or make sense of them. Similarly, the prisoners' footage is integrated into the film but not into an overarching style or discourse. For discussion about the rarity and impact of the imaging of corpses, see the first chapter of Douglas MacDougall's *The Corporeal Image* and Vivian Sobchack's "Inscribing Ethical Space: Ten Propositions on Death, Representation, and Documentary."

western archive, but are returned to them in a manner that invigorates their experience and cultural practices. To borrow Taylor's terms again, instead of the repertoire serving the representative ambitions of an archive, the archive serves to invigorate the repertoire.

In addition to these situations of filming and viewing, "Video nas Aldeias" organizes workshops that train indigenous people in filmmaking and aim at giving them autonomy over audiovisual production. Further subverting the patterns of collection and circulation of images of indigenous peoples, the group also facilitates the distribution of images among native groups, thus making indigenous people, rather than the metropolitan viewer, the recipients of the images. The collaborative initiated a boom of production of eclectic material, fictional as well as documentary, independently made by indigenous directors as well as in collaboration with white filmmakers, all of which reflect the interests of native people rather than the archival ambitions of anthropology or the curiosity of metropolitan voyeurism.⁸⁸ The archival memory produced in this process serves as a mnemonic device that nurtures indigenous cultures rather than furthering a logic of their extraction and storage in a museum-like archive of lost cultures, the memorializing western practice that Renato Rosaldo dubs "imperialist nostalgia."⁸⁹

Similar projects have been set up in an urban context, such as the São Paulo

⁸⁸ For more, see <http://www.videonasaldeias.org.br/2009/vna.php?p=1>. Sometimes Video nas Aldeias produces feature length films, such as the well-received *Pirinop, meu primeiro contato* (*Pirinop, My First Contact*, 2007), co-directed by Mari Corrêa and Karané Ikpeng, which revisits the trope of the first contact from the perspective of the Ikpeng people.

⁸⁹ See Rosaldo's *Culture and Truth*. The phrase, which I briefly mentioned in Chapter Two, names a paradoxical western practice of mourning for (and archiving) the culture one has participated in destroying: "Curiously enough, agents of colonialism . . . often display nostalgia for the colonized culture as it was 'traditionally' (that is, when they first encountered it)" (Rosaldo 69).

based “Oficinas Kinoforum,” which has trained youth from underprivileged backgrounds in audiovisual production since 2001. Kinoforum aims “to consolidate cultural citizenship of youths from populations excluded from . . . access to culture, including enjoyment and consumption” and to facilitate the “social and cultural transformation of their community using art as a means of personal and collective growth.”⁹⁰ Many of the short films produced by Kinoforum participants can be seen on the workshop’s Web site and demonstrate a plethora of themes and styles.⁹¹ Although the organization offers support to their graduates, they ultimately hope to create autonomous, independent producers. From these descriptions of the organization’s ambitious goals, we can glean a politics reminiscent of that of 1960s revolutionary cinema—optimistically invested in the capacity of the media to transform the world socially and politically. But these goals are pursued by Kinoforum not by reaching out to audiences with revolutionary films, but by creating participatory conditions of production.

Projects such as Paulo Sacramento’s *Prisioneiro*, “Video nas Aldeias,” and “Oficinas Kineforum” develop aspects of the other films that this dissertation discusses. Chapter One, for instance, deals with the pluralized agency that inhabits *Iracema*, a result of the recording of contingent and uncontrolled gestures as well as the unrehearsed improvisation of non-actors. These recent projects have kinship with this aspect of *Iracema* but take it to a higher degree through the distribution of control over the audiovisual technology. The democratization of the means of production—

⁹⁰ For more, see the group's site at <http://www.kinoforum.org/oficinas/index.php/programa.html>.

⁹¹ Specialized festivals and circuits of distribution are also appearing, such as the CineCufa (since 2007), which shows only works produced by artists living in “favelas.” For more, see their site at <http://www.cinecufa.com.br/>.

one of the possible horizons of the cinema of experience—illustrates practices that take place at the limits of, or even beyond cinema. Production by Kinoforum graduates includes music videos, short fiction, and even presentational performances that remit to the cinema of attractions. By and large, this work is distributed only through the internet. The democratization of production brings diversity to the audiovisual and takes it well beyond what is normally understood as cinema.

Many directors, however, continue to create innovative experiential works that further explore the practices that this dissertation discusses, but remain decidedly within the realm of cinema. Karim Ainouz and Marcelo Gomes' *Viajo porque preciso, volto porque te amo* (*I Travel Because I Have To, I Come Back Because I Love You*, 2009), is a fiction film about a broken-hearted geologist who is surveying the northeastern backlands, the “sertão,” for the construction of a waterway and a series of dams. The film remits to *Iracema* in the way it contemplates the impact of a large-scale infrastructural project on the inhabitants of the region (by visiting towns that will be purposely flooded, for instance). An even stronger evocation of *Iracema* results from the way the camera moves through the embodied materiality of an unmanaged living world, meeting glances and reactions from non-actors, including roadside prostitutes. Like *Iracema*, *Viajo*'s experiential practice rests on an openness to the contingencies of encounters. Moreover, with greater intensity than that of the 1974 film, *Viajo*'s camerawork conjures the viewer's bodily sensations into participation at the moment of production of the film. With the exception of a few brief sequences, the camera stays hoisted on the shoulder of the protagonist-narrator, subjecting the viewer to an embodied motility. Although we never see this cameraman's body, we feel its

presence at every turn, to the point that our experience of the film is one of corporeal contagion, a slippage of sensations that conjures us to the moment of filming.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

In many ways *Viajo* also invokes *Bye bye Brasil*. Recall from the introduction the scene that displays, from the outside, the stickers of hands pressed against the windshield of the truck. This, I argued, was the evocation of a non-allegorical, experiential cinema lodged deep within an allegorical film. As if responding to this call, throughout much of *Viajo* we look at the world from within a traveling vehicle (Figure 1). The surveying mission of the trip works as a conceit that is in tension with the corporeality of what is actually taking place. Rather than creating a conceptual or disembodied removal from the world, the film's mode of production emphasizes

physical presence and tactile proximity, exemplified in a number of textural shots, such as the extreme close-ups of geologic formations (Figures 2 and 3). The only parts of the narrator's body that we ever see are his hands, as in Figure 3, where they hold the compass. Significantly, the image shows the tactile handling of one of his surveying instruments. Here the relationship between the immediacy of the body and the removed perspective of the territorial map, discussed in the Introduction, is reconfigured. The body is not approached from the outside, or from a removed perspective. Rather, the world is approached through the embodied senses of the narrator-protagonist—senses with which our own commune.

Andrea Tonacci's *Serras da desordem* (Hills of Disorder, 2006), another outstanding recent film, is a reenactment that uses real-life participants. It bears resemblance, therefore, with the initial conception of *Cabra*. Its context and location are also evocative of *Bye bye Brazil* and *Iracema*—to the point that a segment of the latter is included in the film: a cinematic citation. *Serras* reenacts the life of Carapirú, a native whose village was massacred by hired gunmen in 1978. For the following ten years, this traumatized survivor, who speaks no Portuguese and stealthily avoids contact with whites, wanders through the interior of Brazil, until he is taken in by a family of peasants in the state of Bahia, two thousand kilometers away from where he started. Sometime later, the FUNAI (Fundação Nacional do Índio) hears of the case and takes charge of Carapirú. Suspecting his ethnicity, they arrange an encounter with another member of the Guajá group, a young man who had been rescued by FUNAI as a child. This man turns out to be none other than Carapirú's own son, who had also miraculously escaped the massacre. This unlikely encounter preoccupied the television

news for a brief period—and Tonacci includes footage from Rede Globo about the event. But the film is not interested in the spectacular coincidence, but in the experiences and encounters that took place before it.

In Tonacci's film, Carapirú walks again some of the ground he had traveled and meets again the people who played a role in his life, such as the peasant family in Bahia and the FUNAI indigenist who took his case. Some scenes emphasize a fictionlike constructedness, as in the restaging of the massacre, which appears in glimpses, suggestive of traumatic memory, at once inaccessible and determining of Carapirú's experience. Other scenes show candid moments, such as when the participants sit around the kitchen table of the peasant family. These are "commemorations," observes critic Andrea França, drawing not on the usual meaning of the word but from the idea suggested by its etymological parts: an act of remembering with or together (159). Moreover, these scenes are rife with tension between dramaturgy and spontaneity, as well as between the affection among the participants and the discomfort generated by their linguistic and cultural inability to communicate. Like *Cabra*, *Serras* intervenes in a complex historical situation by attempting to rehabilitate experience in the present through a corporeal recovery of fragments from the past. The film is invested in rearticulating the relationship between past and present, but it attempts to do so not discursively but somatically.

The yielding of discursive power on the part of the director, granting centrality to the reenacted experience of the participants, not only places the film in the category of experiential cinema, but allows comparison with other projects that otherwise would seem quite different from it, as is the case of Coutinho's *Jogo de cena* (*Playing*,

2007).⁹² To make *Jogo*, Coutinho placed an ad in a Rio newspaper inviting women to narrate their life experiences on film. The conversations take place on the stage of a theater, with the women sitting at a table with their backs turned to the rows of empty seats. Then Coutinho selects some of the material and passes it over to professional actresses, who are asked to perform the role of the women interviewed in the same location. The final film intercuts the two sets of footage without demarcating them. Of course, a viewer familiar with the actresses (among them, Fernanda Torres, who is quite well known) will be able to differentiate between the “real” person and the acting one. Otherwise, viewers are confronted with a doubling of bodies narrating the same episodes and responding similarly—through gestures, facial expressions, laughter, and sometimes tears—to the affective import of the stories. This is also a form of reenactment, a mimetic contagion through which bodies exchange forms of knowledge.

This experiment also bears similarity to Cao’s *Rua*. The apartment switch is an experiment by which a person inhabits the space of a stranger—who, in the urban context, is the ever-present other whom one passes in the streets or stands uncomfortably close to in buses and elevators. Cao’s film inverts this proximity without intimacy by provoking an empathetic intimacy that occurs in the absence of physical proximity. In *Jogo*, the experiment is akin to this switch, being the act of inhabiting another’s stories and mannerisms. Whatever happens in these films does so not at the level of discourse but of bodily experiences whose ultimate meaning is not

⁹² In light of the category of experiential cinema, the film is not as singular as some critics have suggested. See for instance Leonardo Mecchi’s review at <http://www.revistacinetica.com.br/serrasdadesordem.htm>.

the director's to define. Moreover, the empty theater seats behind the participants help suggest what is collectively accomplished by the cinema of experience: what takes place at the moment of filming is given priority over the film's representational meanings or even presentational effects to be received by an audience.

My mentioning of additional experiential projects and films in this conclusion serves not just to illuminate the horizons of these practices, but to show the fruitfulness of experiential cinema as a concept for thinking about the practices, the aesthetics and the politics contemporary audiovisual production. Moreover, the inclusion of *Viajo*, *Serras*, and *Jogo* serves to remind us of what is most important for all of the films this dissertation examines. Filmmakers like Eduardo Coutinho are not the authors of meaningful texts but mediators and enablers of corporeal experiences. To appreciate such films, critical thought cannot stray far from the body. This dissertation began with an allegory about the displacement of the hands that were pressed against the screen. What it ultimately traces is their return.

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